

OUR MAGICAL ANCESTORS

RECLAIMING OUR TANGLED ROOTS

An advance essay from Luke Hauser's forthcoming book

Read this essay and much more online – WeaveAndSpin.org/history

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"Erudite, good-humoured, generous, with that open-minded readiness to recognise merit in many different sources of inspiration that is one of the best features of the Reclaiming tradition."

- Ronald Hutton, Professor of History, University of Bristol

"Presents an enormous amount of material in a very attractive and readable way."

- Michael D. Bailey, Department of History, Iowa State University
Associate Editor: Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft

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How did we get here? Where are we coming from? What are the origins of our beliefs and practices?

We'll examine familiar and obscure sources ranging from magical to political to cultural, looking at what each has bequeathed (intentionally or otherwise) to modern practicing Pagans.

The main essay, in seven sections, surveys our magical and spiritual roots from ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia to Gerald Gardner and Marija Gimbutas.

A second essay looks at activist and cultural roots that fed into Reclaiming and other pagan-activist circles around 1980.

There's even a special Pagan Workers' Vanguard!

These essays are intended as chapters of a forthcoming book to be published by Reclaiming Quarterly.

Feedback welcome! This version ©2020 (March 2020 edit).

For updates on the new book, or for questions or feedback, email ReclaimingQuarterly@gmail.com.

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A special feature from Reclaiming & WeaveAndSpin.org

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Join us around the witchcamp bonfire for 17 classic Reclaiming chants written by Starhawk, Suzanne Sterling, T. Thorn Coyle, and others. The album features many of Reclaiming's most-loved chants of the 2000s.

Recorded by a chorus plus conga, guitar, fiddle, flute, clarinet, and even a ukelele!

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Free download of our 50-page full-color Lyrics & Lore booklet at CampfireChants.org

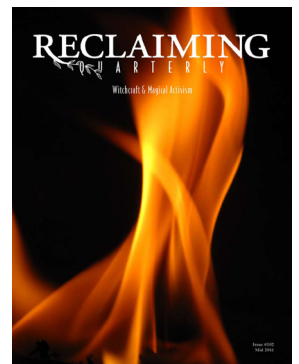


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Plus lots of other features on gender, magic, ritual, Tarot, music, activism, and much more!

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One version
of

Our Magical Ancestors

Reclaiming Our Tangled Roots

Who are these people who call themselves Pagans, Witches, and workers of magic? Where did they come from?

Are we the heirs of ancient witchy feminist Pagans who survived underground until their rediscovery by Gerald Gardner? Descendants of Goddess-worshipping, Stonehenge-building Druidic Celts? Disciples of Renaissance Hermetical Cabalistic alchemists whose transmutational formulae have eluded interpretation until our very day?

Or is the truth a bit more humble? Maybe we're more like magpies looking for shiny objects to decorate our spiritual nests?

Does It Really Matter?

Regardless of how we got here, our connection to the Goddess and the Earth is a present-day, living relation. It isn't based in rediscovering or accurately re-creating parts of the past. We are grounded in the here and now.

And yet – how *did* we get here? What's the reality behind our myths?

Prefatory Postmodern Reflections

There are countless ways of telling our historical backstory, from the fanciful to the footnoted. Every version of our history is both personal and political in its choices and emphases. Perhaps every version is mythical.

My hope is that this version has some connection to the lived experiences of our ancestors.

In the best postmodern tradition, here are a few things this essay is *not*:

- It is not a history of Reclaiming – it's the backstory that leads up to the founding of our tradition around 1980.
- It is not a comprehensive history of magic – it's Western magic from the perspective of today's practicing Pagans.
- It is not a footnoted paper – a bibliography follows, but otherwise it's one person's sense of how we got here.

Linear ABCs

Writing a narrative tends to imply a linear development of history. The many subsections and overlapping dates of this essay highlight the non-linear, multi-threaded nature of our backstory.

Think of this as a pleasant excursion, not a treadmill.

Read what calls to you. Skip around as you wish. Feel free to ignore entire sections.

A Final Warning!

Just know that if Reclaiming should turn out to be the culmination of the entire 5000-year history of Western Paganism, you may be tested on this material when you arrive at the Isle of Apples.

Don't say you weren't warned.

– Luke Hauser, *Parahistorian* / Cover illustration Hieronymous Bosch



Assyria sends a communique from across the ages, granting us permission to use their pictures for our book. Impression from a cylindrical seal – Mesopotamia c. 700 BCE.

Our Cultural & Activist Ancestors

A major part of Reclaiming's backstory is found not in ritual circles or magic classes but in the streets.

Reclaiming and our generations are heirs to a long tradition of nonviolent resistance.

For a survey of movements that have inspired Reclaiming's style of magical activism, see the Activism chapter (forthcoming).



PART I: ANCIENT LEGACIES

PREHISTORY

APPROX 2.4 MILLION TO 10,000 BCE

Before we get to history proper, let's pause to remember our prehistoric forebears – those early sapient types who figured out which berries to eat, things you can do with rocks, and what happens when you rub two sticks together.

Along the way they found time to populate the furthest reaches of the planet, create language, paint cave walls, and domesticate animals. At some point they started noticing the patterns of the stars, the changing of the seasons, and how rivers rose and fell. Some people think that the earliest myths were ways of keeping track and passing along this sort of knowledge.

All in all, it's not a bad track record.

What We Inherit: Language. Art. Astronomy. Fire!

PREHISTORY

APPROX 10,000 TO 3000 BCE

While we're musing on early times – what about those little goddess figures like the Venus of Willendorf or the woman holding up a snake in each hand?

They're officially "prehistory" as well – ie, before written sources. No accounts tell us what the figurines might have meant or been used for, or what their creators thought about magic, religion, or life in general.

Still, we have two sources – well, three, counting our intuition. But let's look at the two that academia acknowledges:

(1) surviving artifacts, from megalithic ("giant stone") structures such as Stonehenge to more human-scaled human and animal figurines, stone tools, weapons, etc.

A Note on Western Orientation

Most of this essay traces our "Western" influences.

By this I mean the regions west of Persia – namely Mesopotamia, Egypt, North Africa, the Mediterranean areas of Europe, and eventually Northern Europe.

Toward the end we'll look briefly at Eastern (ie, east of Persia) influences, and also at appropriated influences from Native American and Afro-Caribbean traditions.

(2) archaeological remains such as the excavated foundations of ancient villages or ritual sites.

Consider the "goddess" figurines such as the Venus of Willendorf or the snake-handling woman from Crete.

Whether or not they were intended as deities, these female sculptures suggest societies with strong, positive images of women.



Did they embody "feminist" values?

Some archaeological finds support this theory. For instance, the excavations at Catal Huyuk (modern Turkey) reveal a small city on an open plain with no defensive walls, no fortifications, and burials revealing no weapons and little distinction of wealth. Riane Eisler and others have suggested that this indicates a peaceful, relatively egalitarian society.

Large-scale temples or religious sites are unknown in the pre-historic Mediterranean, and perhaps none existed. This was an era of sparse agricultural populations which may neither have waged routine war on their neighbors, nor created regional religious shrines. If there were larger gatherings, they seem not to have left archaeological traces. (Of course, neither do the tens of thousands who gather in the desert for Burning Man.)

At the Westernmost end of Europe, on the other hand, pre-Celtic groups built huge stone circles. We have no written accounts of the purpose of these structures or how they were built. The orientation of Stonehenge toward the Summer Solstice Sunrise has long been noted. Recent archaeology suggests alternately that Stonehenge may have been a burial and ritual site oriented toward the setting Sun at Winter Solstice.

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What We Inherit: The notion that once, prior to 5000 years of bloody patriarchal history, there existed peaceful, cooperative, woman-honoring societies which endured for centuries or millennia. This inspiration overthrows older ideas of incessantly violent, all-against-all prehistory, and guides much of our "reclamation" work. (If this vision turns out to be historically inaccurate, we'll still work to create it.)

ANCIENT EGYPT

C. 3500 - 400 BCE

With Egypt and the pyramids we enter the written history of the West. Many pyramids were built as royal tombs which, if they didn't endow their occupants with eternal, slave-attended life, at least had the merit of preserving hordes of artifacts and writings. (For our society an analogous site might be our storage units, where we preserve old things we don't want to lose track of.)

Despite its economy and culture being based around the annual flooding of the Nile, most of Egypt has a dry climate favorable to the survival of papyrus. This preserves a written record spanning several millennia and makes the region a key source for the study of ancient spirituality.

Hieroglyphics – today understood as an ornate phonetic script with some special characters – were long believed to be a secret language whose meanings, originally revealed only to initiates, had been lost amid the shifting sands of time. Seen as arcane symbols (no doubt hiding deep spiritual secrets), hieroglyphics became the archetype of the “secret magical language” that inspired generations of magicians and alchemists.

Most of all, Egypt has always been known for its mysterious and elaborate rites around death, burial, and the afterlife. The famous Book of the Dead is a collection of ceremonies for sending souls to a prosperous and happy afterlife. Intended only for the Egyptian elite, the book and its traditions have gone on to inspire elaborate funeral rites in many societies and social strata.

What We Inherit: Egypt's gift to all subsequent Western cultures is an obsessive concern for the well-being of the dead. In ancient Egypt the concern was primarily with the pharaoh and his family. Eventually, Christianity, Gnosticism, and the mystery cults democratized the afterlife.

Modern Pagan groups orient our Wheel of the Year around Halloween/Samhain – the time when the veil

is thin between the worlds of the living and the dead. Reclaiming's “founding ritual,” the ancestor-focused Spiral Dance, was held at Samhain 1979 (and every year since).

Egyptian deities and narratives (eg, Isis and Osiris) occasionally find a place in our camps and rituals, but Egypt is not (yet) a major source of our mythical workings.

MESOPOTAMIA

C. 3500 - 400 BCE

Mesopotamia – the land watered by the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers – saw a succession of regional empires such as Sumeria, Assyria, and Babylonia. We acknowledge our Mesopotamian forebears for creating or advancing irrigation, metal working, city states, the West's earliest astronomical data, and written language, in which they recorded the oldest-known Western literature and myths.

Thanks to scribes using clay tablets, a huge treasury of documents survive. Ranging from accounting records to magical spells, from royal chronicles to rambling mythic narratives, they give us a rich picture of some of the oldest known literate societies.

What sorts of magic did these ancestors do? Spells survive for purification of temples, appeasing the anger of gods and goddesses, protection from disease or injury, and charging a stone or talisman.

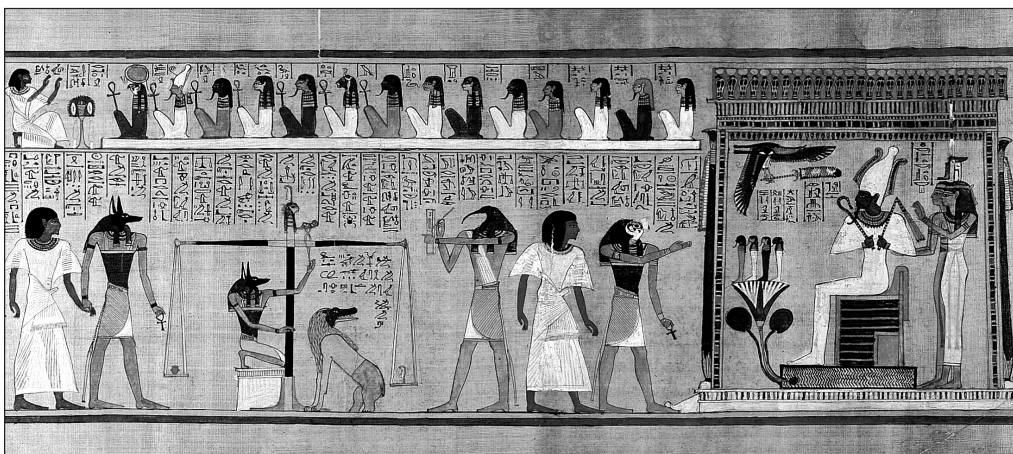
One spell seeking help from Ishtar required the person to gather “dust from a quay, dust from a ferry, dust from a bridge, dust from a crossing of four roads, dust from a city gate, dust from a dais, dust from the door of the Ishtar temple...” – and that was just the first step!

What We Inherit: Ancient Mesopotamia left a legacy of religio-magical narratives, including creation myths, pantheons of deities and demigods, heroic combat with monsters, journeys to the land of the dead – all in all, the earliest magical “fiction.” Much of Western mythology

traces roots back to this region and period.

Mesopotamia is the source of some classic WitchCamp myths, led by Inanna's journey to the underworld. If there are copyrights in the afterlife, we are going to owe 4000 years of royalties.

Egyptian souls being weighed in the presence of Ma'at, goddess of divine justice? Or a scene from a local market? Maybe a creative painter included both?



CRETE & MINOAN CIVILIZATION

C. 2000-1500 BCE

The island of Crete, relatively isolated in an age of small ships and safe from predatory Mesopotamian and Egyptian empires, was the first Mediterranean civilization to develop enduring architecture and written language.

Around 1500 BCE a small-scale urban society flourished, with stone buildings and a highly-evolved artistic culture. Famous frescoes show young men and women leaping over bulls – as sport, ritual, or both?

Crete is famous for the myth of King Minos, the Minotaur, and the labyrinth in which the beast was imprisoned. Although today we think of labyrinths as circular, some people have suggested that the origin of the myth was later visitors seeing the ruins of the maze of stone buildings that made up the capitol at Knossos (Crete was probably destroyed by an earthquake, although possibly by an invasion).

What We Inherit: Labyrinths! The prominence of women in sacred and social contexts (such as bull-leaping).

GREECE

C. 800-300 BCE

A century ago, Greece was hailed as the progenitor of all that is good and true and Western. Besides inventing classical art and architecture, they worshiped a neatly-organized pantheon and wrote unrivaled epic poems about journeys to strange lands. In their spare time, they saved Europe from the evil Persian hordes.

Today Greece is studied in a Mediterranean context, with its classical art seen as a late-flowering continuation of Egyptian and Mesopotamian styles. The Homeric poems (written down around 800 BCE) can be seen as developing a genre of tall tales dating back to Gilgamesh (written down perhaps 1500-1200 BCE).

Pythagoras and his school, flourishing in the 500s BCE, emphasized numerical and musical proportion, including the idea that movements of the planets and stars create the

“harmony of the spheres.”

Pythagoras is said to have believed in reincarnation and the transmigration of souls, and claimed to recall several past lives. Some ancient sources say he was a vegetarian except for ritual sacrifices.

Greek science, building on older Mesopotamian (and possibly Indian/Vedic) traditions, worked out theories about the nature of physical reality. Empedocles (c. 450 BCE, about a century before Plato and Aristotle) is credited as the first to identify four basic physical elements: Earth, Air, Fire, and Water.

Aristotle later added a fifth element, sometimes called Aether or Quintessence, which he saw as constituting the unchanging heavenly bodies.

Greek philosophy explored the world as science and observation (Aristotle), and also as to its ultimate nature and purpose (Plato). Plato saw the world of spirit/intellect as the true reality – the physical world is just a pale shadow. This idea will recur repeatedly over the centuries, notably via Gnosticism.

Greek magic continued trends from earlier ages, with spells for things like healing, success, and love. Greek writings suggest a marked distinction between the divinatory practices of the official priests and the more disreputable “goetia,” or low magic, of commoners.

Greece’s prejudice against non-Greeks gave us the word “magic,” from *magos*, their term for a Persian (hence foreign) priest, and eventually even for unofficial Greek practitioners of common goetia – as opposed to the “religious” practices of the official Greek priesthood.

What We Inherit: Greek goddesses, gods, heroes, anti-heroes, and their all-too-human stories are a favorite repository of past wisdom, insight, and bemusement.

Theories of Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle simmer beneath later trends in philosophy, religion, and magic.

The four basic elements held sway for two millennia, although much adapted over the centuries. Only in the 1800s were they definitively supplanted by the modern panoply of elements.



The chill dignity of Greek and Roman goddesses has never been surpassed.

The Golden Dawn and British Wicca, adapting older traditions, correlated the four classical elements with the four directions to symbolically anchor our magical circles.

We also inherit from our Greek ancestors a collection of biases such as a strong emphasis on male domination of all forms of public culture, as well as a tendency toward dualistic, either/or thinking – particularly in ethics, where good/bad dichotomies continue to plague our thinking.

CELTIC TRADITIONS

C. 600 BCE TO 800 CE

According to one intuitive poll, 89.7% of Reclaiming people claim at least one recent matrilineal Celtic ancestor.

Who were these reproductively prolific forebears?

The term “Celts” refers to a not to a homogeneous ethnic group, but to a cultural network that shared pottery and metal-working styles and probably a family of languages. Dating from around 600-800 BCE, these iron-age peoples expanded from (areas today known as) the Hungarian plains to cover much of Central Europe as far as Britain, coastal Spain, and Northern Italy.

Celtic groups traded extensively with Greek city-states, and are among the “barbarian” peoples recorded by Greek writers. Around 387 BCE, Celtic tribes living in northern Italy attacked and sacked Rome, then a strong but relatively isolated city-state.

Later, as Rome began to expand northward after 200 BCE, the loosely organized Celts were either absorbed into the Roman empire (modern France and western Germany) or driven north and west – some to Britain and eventually Ireland, where Celtic culture blended with older traditions.



Quick – make up a story about what is happening in this picture!
Detail from Gundestrup cauldron, Celtic c. 100 BCE.

By the time of the German/Roman civil wars around 300 CE onward, the Celts were not a major factor on the continent.

Roman writers around 100 CE mention Celtic deities, syncretizing (combining) them with their Roman counterparts so that honoring Lugh was still acceptable, so long as you paid homage (and taxes) to Mercury at the same time.

In Ireland, the traditions continued to evolve. Irish and/or Celtic goddesses were syncretized with Christian saints – the best-known being Brigid. Ancient wells were “re-christened” – only to be rediscovered as Pagan shrines in modern times.

Around 800 CE, Irish monks wrote down Celtic legends as they were being told at that time. These narratives, closely interwoven with other strands of Irish lore, are much loved by modern Wiccans, and have formed our conception of Ireland as the Celtic homeland.

What We Inherit. Brigid and her sacred wells. The names of our cross-quarter sabbats (Samhain, Beltane, etc). A pantheon of deities and stories. Decorative motifs for Pagan jewelry.

We also inherit a certain amount of misinformation about Celtic culture and deities, based on Christian overlays from the Middle Ages and over-hasty folkloric interpretations from the 1800s.

ROME

C. 400 BCE TO 400 CE

Rome is a hodge-podge. Rome’s own founding myths suggest the earliest Romans were runaways, fugitives, and freebooters. I’ve always felt an affinity.

Organized as an aristocratic republic around 500 BCE, Rome was transformed into an empire around 25 BCE (following civil wars involving Julius and Augustus Caesar). At its peak around 250 CE, the Roman Empire spanned the entire Mediterranean region, most of North Africa, north to Britain, the Rhine, and the Danube, and east to encompass the Balkans, Turkey, and modern Iraq. The Empire traded with India via the Arabian Sea, and had secondary contacts as far as China and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Although the Empire was never a homogeneous whole, many people (soldiers, officials and their families, scholars, craft specialists, etc) traveled far and wide. Cities (common throughout the Mediterranean, rare in the North) hosted a variety of cultures, classes, and religions.

Many religions were tolerated. Roman policy was to repress or punish only actual harm, disruption, or law-breaking – conformity of opinion or belief was not

expected (although paying honor and taxes to the official deities was demanded of most people – the Jews being a notable exception).

The result was a vast mixing of cultures and sharing of ideas, stories, and techniques – including magic. Many foreign religions gained a toehold in the capitol – cults of Dionysus, Cybele, and the Great Mother among them.

Roman literature, known for classics of history and politics, also left satirical portraits of different sorts of people. Poets such as Virgil and Lucan crafted vivid descriptions of elderly, hag-like women who worked maliciously inhuman spells – an image that will haunt the European imagination for centuries until it helps animate the witch hunts.

What We Inherit: Our affinity for Greek myths and deities stems from the fact that Rome, which lacked a developed mythology of its own, merged its deities with Greek gods and goddesses and preserved their stories in Latin poetry. The Middle Ages were the Latin Age, and passed this Roman heritage on to Modern times.

Rome bequeaths the idea of broad religious tolerance – an ideal the West has struggled to regain ever since.

It also gave Europe its abiding image of the evil witch.

JEWISH TRADITIONS

ROMAN ERA TO MIDDLE AGES

Judaism produced a written scriptural sourcebook going back centuries, and some of the texts figure repeatedly in the history of magic and religion. Christians, Gnostics, and Moslems adopted parts of Jewish scripture as their own, each giving the older material a new spin.

During the Roman era, Jews were an important religious group. One writer estimates that one-sixth of the people in the eastern Mediterranean region were Jewish. Besides the often-volatile Middle East, there were large Jewish populations in Alexandria, Antioch, and other cities.

The written scriptures, developed and refined over centuries, preserve countless tales and narratives. The Genesis creation story, including the Garden of Eden, is a founding myth for virtually half of the planet. Tales of giants, floods, epic combats, exiles and wanderings, perseverance and hope – these are a legacy to all of the West.

Ancient Judaism had its own esoteric traditions, including tales of magical combat by Moses and Aaron during the Egyptian sojourn. Rods turn into serpents, frogs rain down from the skies, seas are parted, and commandments are carved into stone (twice) by a jealous and rather moody deity.

Jewish scriptures contain several injunctions against magic and witchcraft. These have been subjected to a

wide range of interpretations over the centuries, particularly after Christianity put imperial power behind them.

In later ages, the intricacies of Hebrew script itself were subjected to painstaking religio-magical analysis, with everything from divine knowledge to power over demons promised to those who persevered. The Kabbalah developed as a tool for explicating the creation and meaning of the universe – and wound up influencing Tarot divination as well – see below.

What We Inherit: Our faith in a better tomorrow stems from Hebrew ideas that history is *not* simply circular and repetitive, nor a simple decline from a past Age of Gold, but has a direction and purpose – that the “golden age” might be in the future, not just the past.

A related idea is that of Tikkun Olam: working to heal, repair, and restore the world.

Hebrew scriptures are deeply rooted in our cultural psyche, and help create our sense of what religious myth is all about. The arcane numerosophy (number-wisdom) of Kabbalah has shaped the West’s subconscious sense of what numbers mean – see below regarding interpretations of the Tarot Minor Arcana.

From these scriptures and others sources comes the notion that people can talk back to power – the Hebrew prophets provide stirring examples of common people speaking truth to kings.

On the flip side, we don’t treat our writings as sacred scripture – not yet, anyway.

MYSTERY CULTS

APPROX 500 BCE TO 500 CE

The term “mystery cults” is a modern category that includes various initiatory and often ecstatic devotional groups and practices. Some were regular congregations, others annual gatherings which endured for centuries.

The name is misleading. Most were not “cults” in the modern sense, but more like ever-evolving congregations and gatherings. Annual Pagan events carry on this tradition.

The term “mysteries” doesn’t mean that they were secret, or that they gathered to read the latest fantasy fiction thriller. It suggests that the meaning of the rituals could not be expressed in language, but had to be experienced by each person.

One of the most famous of these “mysteries” is that of Persephone at Eleusis near Athens. The Eleusinian Mysteries, part of a longer festival, seem to have been a personal journey of discovery and self-awareness, culminating with insights into the meaning of life and death.

Many devotees took part in this ritual twice (lists of

participants have been discovered). One writer (Bowden) suggests that people attended once as a novitiate, spent a year in devotional practice, then returned to re-experience the ceremonies and complete their initiation.

For most, Bowden suggests, this was sufficient. A small number returned and became the guides and organizers for the next sets of initiates.

Other cults included Mithras (popular among soldiers but closed to women – a fatal flaw), Bacchus, Cybele, and the Great Mother. Some had sacred sites such as Eleusis. Others were urban or wandering groups.

Some of these cults engaged in ecstatic, possibly drug-or-alcohol-fueled processions and rites involving loud and jarring music, wild dancing, and self-flagellation. The Romans, generally tolerant of various religions, didn't take kindly to civic disturbances, leading to violent repressions such as the reported persecution of Bacchian celebrants around 186 BCE.

This sort of attack on a religious group seems to have been relatively rare in the Roman world, where magic and religion were suppressed only when some perceived harm or disruption occurred.

Early Christianity may have been seen by some contemporaries as similar to these mystery movements. Not surprisingly, when it gained political power, Christianity moved to close down the competing cults.

What We Inherit: WitchCamp, where we gather to connect with the divine and with our own deepest selves, is a distant offshoot of the Eleusinian Mysteries – and Persephone has graced more than a few camps!

The notion of a “year and a day” for initiations stems from these annual religious gatherings. If you attended twice – once as a novitiate, and again in order to become initiated – a year-and-a-day is the shortest period possible.

And the ecstatic aspects of some of these movements, if not a direct influence, have a familiar ring to those who love dancing around a ritual bonfire.

ALEXANDRIA, NEO-PLATONISM, & THE GREEK MAGICAL PAPYRI C. 100-400 CE

From the time of Alexander (c.300 BCE), the Graeco-Egyptian port of Alexandria was a cosmopolitan cultural melting pot, bringing together the disparate threads of the Eastern Mediterranean.

During the Roman era, many spiritual and magical traditions built strong roots in Alexandria, including Gnosticism, Christianity, Neo-Platonism, Stoicism, Judaism (Jews

may have been a quarter of the population), and others.

Neo-Platonism – philosophical tendency which, building on Plato's ideas, took spirit to be the ultimate nature of reality. The origin of all being is pure Spirit – the material world is a distant emanation, with all of the planetary spheres and lesser spiritual realms arrayed between us and the divine Source.

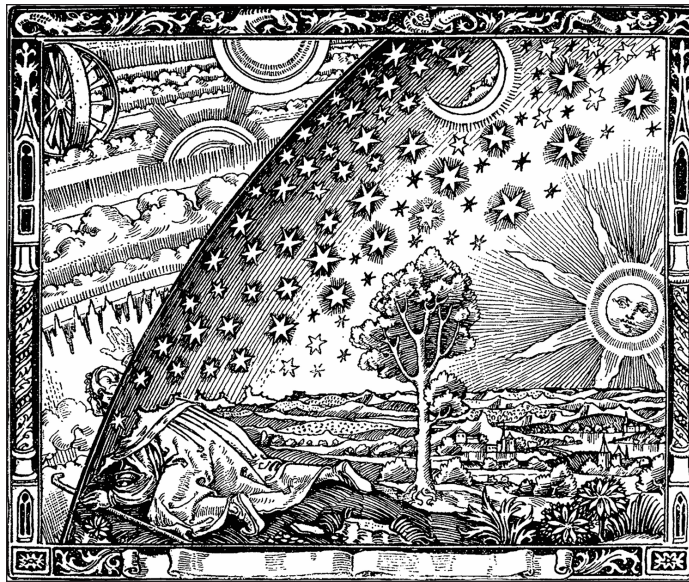
This idea of the material world as a devolution from the purity of the Source took a more visceral form in Gnostic myths of creation as a

harsh fall from divine grace – see below.

The Greek Magical Papyri are a loosely-connected group of manuscripts from Roman-era Egypt. Written mostly in Greek, they reflect ideas current in Alexandria and the Graeco-Egyptian cultural orbit. They rank among the most complicated magical workings ever committed to writing.

Lost for centuries before modern rediscovery, the papyri mix elements from Greek, Egyptian, Jewish, and mystical traditions into elaborate spells, formulae, recipes, chants, workings, and rituals. They contain instructions for commanding demons, making amulets, and preparing magical ointments.

The texts, probably a tiny fraction of what once existed, come from an era when older Egyptian, Greek, and Roman practices were declining in the face of the mystery cults and Christianity. The papyri may have been an attempt to memorialize complicated rituals that were fading from common usage.



*Break on through to the other side – a Gnostic seeker ascends through the planetary spheres and catches a glimpse of the upper realms.
Illustration, known as the Flammarion engraving, probably from 1800s.*

One papyrus features an invocation of the divinity Mithras, who is implored to bestow upon worshipers a vision of immortality. The manuscript also uses “voces magicae,” or magical nonsense sounds, to call on the powers of the four classical elements.

What We Inherit: The complicated rituals and workings of the Greek Magical Papyri set the gold standard for ceremonial magic. Though the original texts were lost for centuries, the memory of complex Egyptian magic served as inspiration for Arabic, Medieval, and Modern ceremonial formulations.

Even non-ceremonial traditions such as Reclaiming inherit basic ritual structures within which we improvise, including elemental and deity invocations.

We also have been known to talk nonsense, carrying on the tradition of the *voces magicae*.

GNOSTICISM FLOURISHED 100-400 CE

Gnosticism, 2000 years after it first flourished, continues to exert a strong influence on alternative spirituality. Once believed to be mainly a dissident Christian movement, the discovery of a library of original texts at Nag Hammadi (Egypt) in 1945 has shown it to be a separate religion in the diverse and polyglot Roman Empire.

While Gnosticism was itself diverse and can't be reduced to a single set of beliefs, many texts exhibit strong anti-material tendencies. The Divine Source of all reality is far beyond the material realm, beyond planets and stars, beyond any conception of deity that we mere mortals can imagine. The Source is the font of all light, truth, under-

standing, being, etc. (Gnosticism adapts ideas from Neo-Platonism – see above).

The Earth, on the other hand, is a fallen realm, about as far from the Divine Source as one can get. Some Gnostic texts spin wild stories about the origins of Earth, often involving the sexual escapades of a demi-goddess named Sophia, or Wisdom. In these accounts, she actually isn't all that wise, and the creation of the cursed Earthly realm is pretty much laid at her doorstep.

Humans, created at the tail end of this sordid process, are lost in a miasma of material confusion. But deep inside each of us – or some of us, anyway – there is buried a spark of the original Source. Our goal is to escape material, worldly temptations and follow that spark back to an awareness of our Divine Source. If we achieve this knowledge (“gnosis”), and learn the proper passwords to say to various celestial guardians, we can re-ascend to heaven upon our Earthly death.

Given the shape of things, it's tempting to agree with the part about the Earth being a “fallen and cursed realm.” I often feel that way when I first wake up.

On the other hand, some of us are given to saying that the Earth *is* the Goddess, that the Earth is a living, divine being, itself the source of our life. So what gives?

During the period when Gnosticism flourished, the spiritual seeker (and later Christian saint) Augustine of Hippo, a city in North Africa, saw it this way: “God created the Earth, and saw it was good. What screwed things up was humans eating the apple and falling from grace. Our fall dragged down the entire planet, which is why it appears to be a cursed place of pain and suffering. The fault lies entirely with erring humans – Earth itself is good.”

What We Inherit: Reclaiming, with no official theology, tends to muddle together both ends of this spectrum. Gnostic-style denunciations of the material world are mingled with veneration of the Earth as the Goddess's body.

Leaving aside the bit about the apple, I think Augustine's solution is close to the mark – the Earth itself is divine, but humans are seriously screwing it up.

ALCHEMY ANCIENT TIMES TO C. 1000

Okay, now for some serious magic! Alchemy calls to us as a material praxis, a psychological-spiritual tool, and as inspiration to pursue our wildest dreams – transmuting the “prima materia” (first material) of this world into the gold of our visions.

Through Western history – encompassing ancient Egypt, Roman-era Gnosticism, Medieval Islam, and Renaissance



Alchemical tip – keep your pet lion handy in case any snakes materialize and need to be eaten!

Europe – the term “alchemy” has comprised a loosely-connected group of beliefs and practices. Unlike, say, Tarot (with its well-documented beginnings and fairly compact 500-year history), alchemy is not a single historical thread.

In ancient Egypt and its successors in Mesopotamia and around the Mediterranean, alchemy may have originated in metallurgical workshops, which due to the value of metals were generally connected to royal palaces or temples. The practices of purifying, mixing, and tempering metals were closely-guarded guild secrets.

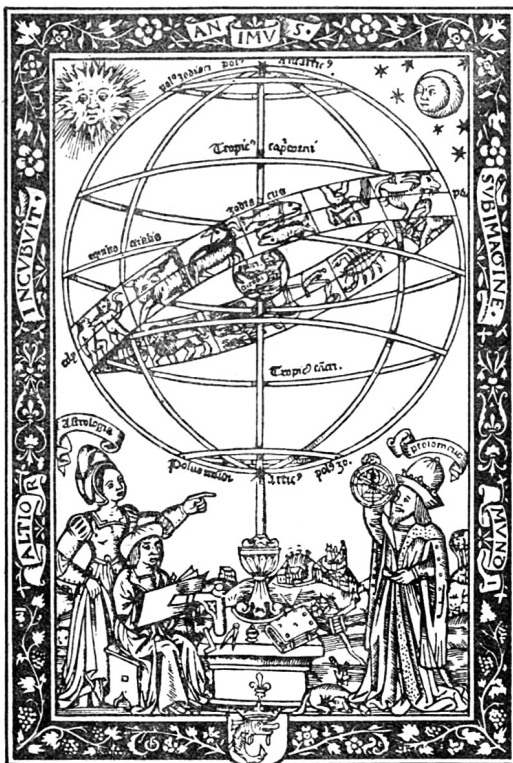
Similarly, specialists working with dyes and pigments were able – through a series of “alchemical” purifications and concentrations – to transmute ordinary plants and minerals into long-lasting coloring agents. Such skills must have seemed to outsiders like magic.

These basic physical and chemical processes laid foundations for the experimental developments of later centuries, and can be traced in the early histories of chemistry and physics. The technical skills remained part of Western culture even at its lowest points.

During the later Roman era, the Hermetic writings and Gnosticism used alchemical imagery to weave bits and pieces from Judaism, Neo-Platonic philosophy, and the mystery cults, recasting metallurgical processes as stages in a spiritual journey (see above and below).

We'll resume this thread during the Renaissance.

What We Inherit: The hope that we can transmute our world before it's too late.



Casting horoscopes goes high-tech – a super-sized armillary sphere from Renaissance times.

DIVINATION & ASTROLOGY PRE-HISTORY TO ABOUT 1400 CE

Divination is recorded far back in human history. Astrology, casting lots, studying the flights (or entrails) of birds, and many other ways of predicting coming events have been used in different societies – each considering its own methods sacred, and others to be magical or superstitious.

Times change. Today we have highly-refined weather prognostication at our fingertips, but entrail reading is nearly a lost art.

Astrology, on the other hand, has had its devotees since ancient Babylonian times – and Babylonian sophistication suggests a long pre-historical backdrop of observation and study of the night sky.

Early observers recognized that the stars and planets, as seen from Earth, trace recurring patterns through the heavens. The discovery of the ring of “zodiacal” constellations through which the sun and planets appear to move is quite ancient. However, different cultures have counted different numbers of constellations, with the number 12 settling in only around Roman times.

The applications of astrology have also changed over the centuries. Various texts from different cultures survive, suggesting that in ancient times the stars were seen as predicting the fate of kingdoms and royalty, but not particularly you or me.

When the methods came to be applied to ordinary people, they were used more to discover a person's character or the overall arc of their life than to predict day-to-day happenings.

Another common use was finding the most propitious time for a certain event – eg, the beginning of a journey, a marriage, or a project. People still speak of the power of the waxing or waning moon or Mercury retrograde – ancient astrology made intricate calculations involving multiple heavenly bodies.

Given these changes, there seems to be no continuous tradition of interpretation, or even longterm agreement about which astral phenomena are to be interpreted. Astrology as practiced today – interpretation of personal charts on a day-to-day basis – is a relatively recent development.

What We Inherit: Astrology is practiced in many magical circles today, but it doesn't often inform our calendars – that is, rituals, classes, and camps are not typically scheduled according to astrological factors (although these may be noted during planning).

PART II: MEDIEVAL MAGIC

(Approximately 500-1500 CE)

TWO MAGICAL THREADS

Richard Kieckhefer, in his short book on Medieval magic, suggests two intertwining threads:

- common traditions – ordinary, day-to-day practices
- learned traditions – consisting of two broad tendencies:
 - literate magic – elaborately structured ceremonies and spells performed by educated elites
 - natural magic – unlocking the hidden secrets of nature

COMMON TRADITIONS: PRACTICAL MAGIC

Common traditions comprise the ordinary practices of non-professionals – charms, amulets, incantations, curses, herbology, etc – the sorts of things that people of those times probably did not consider to be “magic” at all, but simply, “how you do such and such.”

Common traditions include healing, divination, love potions, spells to increase confidence or performance, and more. Techniques included, at various times and places, concocting potions, casting of lots or horoscopes, tea-leaf reading, water or flame scrying, creating of amulets and written charms, and so on.

These practices embodied a great deal of folk wisdom (along with miscellaneous superstitions and prejudices).

Every aspect of life might have its special spells, charms, and incantations.

Some might be simple herbal salves or poultices. Others might be as complex as those of a woman in Todi (Italy) charged in 1428 with working spells to cure illness using a bone from an unbaptized baby, creating a contraceptive by burning a mule’s hoof, and transferring an injury to another person by means of a potion involving thirty different herbs.

What We Inherit: The view that magic is a practical tool to be used and shared in day-to-day life. An informal quality to spells and invocations, and a collective and co-creative approach to discovering “what works.”

LEARNED TRADITIONS: LITERATE MAGIC & NECROMANCY

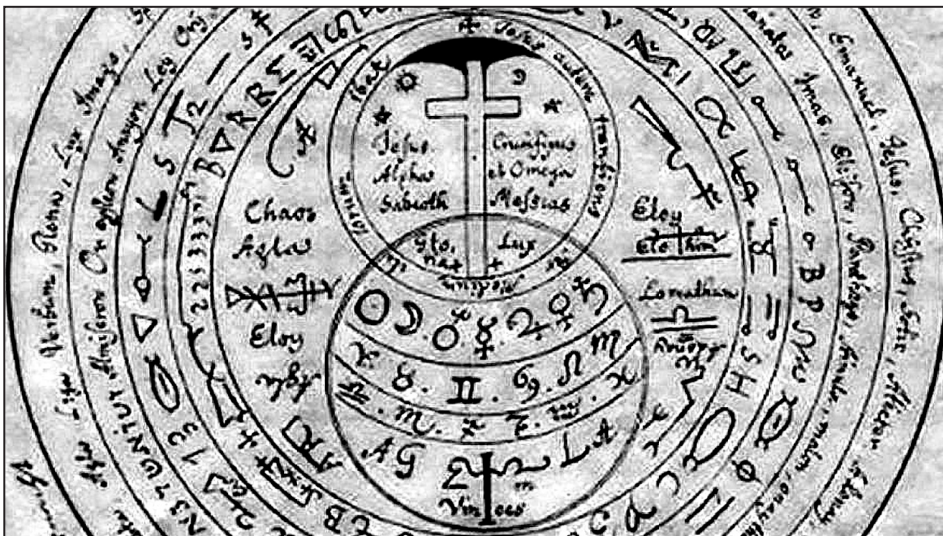
Welcome to the realm of necromancy. Literally the term refers to invoking and working with the spirits of the dead. But the term has come to encompass formal ritual magic in general, and especially summoning spirits, angels, demons, and the like.

In an age when only the educated few were literate, and given the shady nature of such rituals (which sometimes copied or parodied the Catholic mass), it is unlikely that ordinary people had much knowledge or involvement in these rites. Investigations and prosecutions for demonic

magic focused on clerics, not ordinary people. (This will radically change with the witch hunts after about 1500.)

From earliest history until the Enlightenment of the 1700s, few people doubted that our world included not only humans and other living beings, but a host of spirits. In polytheistic times these might be seen as deities, demigods, or the spirit of a place or a natural feature such as a waterfall.

In the Christian era, when official theology denied the existence of any spirits outside of God’s control, these beings came to be seen as angels and demons ultimately subordinate to the monarchical



Imagine your birth chart looking like this – from a Medieval manuscript.

deity – a neat binary division of all supernatural energy into good and evil that is still with us today.

Building on older practices, Moslems, Jews, and Christians developed rituals and spells for summoning and commanding such spirits, often in hopes of obtaining assistance in love, treasure-finding, or professional endeavors.

Some of these rituals survive in manuscripts (often ironically thanks to church and monastic libraries), revealing an obsession with lists of divine and spirit names that if recited perfectly will compel a given spirit to appear and do the ritualist's bidding. Goethe's *Faust* illustrates this sort of ritual – as does the 17th century *Book of Abramelin*.

Enough manuscripts survive to show that Medieval clerics (a general term for anyone educated in the church-controlled universities, not necessarily a priest or monk) certainly considered their activities to be “magical,” and were willing to run the risks of discovery and punishment in return for the hope of power and wealth.

This sort of fussily arcane magic gave way to the alchemical revival around 1500, and both faded in the face of the scientific revolution from about 1650 forward.

What We Inherit: Well, for starts, we write a lot of books about spirituality and magic.

We see the world as populated with myriad spirits, although we tend to agree with the ancients that they are spirits of places and other beings, not God-controlled subordinates.

Our rituals invoke and work with these spirits and deities, but we avoid commanding or restraining them. We see it more as a “power-with” relation.

LEARNED TRADITIONS: NATURAL MAGIC

A second bookish trend was so-called natural magic – the search for the occult (hidden) properties of nature.

That plants and stones have particular properties which can be discovered and utilized is nothing new – once humans discovered honey and berries, the search was on. Imagine the amazement of people first seeing wheat transmuted into bread, or soft clay being shaped and fired into a hard, reusable vessel. Talk about magic!

However bookish the Middles Ages could be, some peo-



Poor ergonomics – an occupational hazard of Medieval scribes.

ple were always alert for new substances and new ways of doing things – some fanciful, such as a given stone's ability to tame dragons, and others quite real, such as the development of new dye pigments.

The Christian theologian Albertus Magnus (Albert the Great, d. 1280) wrote extensively on natural science, and later generations foisted endless books about plant magic and alchemy on him.

Natural magic has strong connections to the “common traditions” discussed above. Ordinary people throughout history have been just as likely to discover a new truth or natural fact as experts, although in retrospect we rely mainly on literate (and usually male) sources such as Albertus to learn about them.

A common method of searching for hidden properties was to study the resemblances of different objects. For instance, beets were understood to be good for the blood because their juice is bright red.

As we will see below, when Christian authorities began to charge that literate magic involved demonic invocations, practitioners of natural magic claimed that they were actually unlocking secrets that God had hidden in the natural world.

This defense worked up to a point – namely, the point at which the new discoveries (for instance, in physiology and astronomy) were themselves undermining established authorities. But that's another story.

What We Inherit: Nature is magical, and it behooves us to learn its secrets. Nuff said!

ARABIC ASTRAL MAGIC 700 TO 1100 CE

Islam arose in the early 600s. By 700 CE, the religion had spread from Morocco and Spain to the North of India. Constantinople (modern Istanbul) and Italy were besieged.

While seldom politically united, Islam fostered a common cultural climate. Heir to the Greek and Egyptian legacies, the Islamic regions flourished while most of Europe was mired in the post-Roman “dark ages.”

Not surprisingly, at a time when its literature, architecture, and medicine were the most advanced in the West, Islamic regions also produced cutting-edge magic. Over the subsequent centuries, hundreds of Arabic manuscripts on a wide range of topics were translated into Latin, forming the basis for later Western philosophy, science, and magical theory.

Foremost among the techniques that eventually made their way into broader circulation were astral and talismanic magic.

Astral magic is built on the Neo-Platonic notion of a magical/spiritual “fluid” that flows through and unites the cosmos. Stars and planets especially focus this energy, and trained magicians can tap into astral emanations and draw them into objects to create talismans.

Talismans are magically-charged objects which can range from pieces of parchment to precious gems. The material of which the talisman is made affects its power – for instance, copper is especially effective in drawing energy from Venus.

The object might be inscribed with names, words, and/or images to attract and focus the particular energy. The talisman might then be charged by placing it under the rays of the desired astral body – for instance, leaving a love-talisman in the starlight when Venus is especially bright.

What We Inherit: Talismans! Neo-Pagans do their part to preserve this heritage by including craft fairs at nearly every gathering. Modern Pagans and Wiccans carry on older practices of magically charging objects such as necklaces, rings, and amulets.

Arabic astral magic bequeaths to us a sense that the universe is pervaded with magical/spiritual energy. Our challenge is to learn to tap into and direct this energy.

PRE-INDUSTRIAL EUROPE: A CULTURE OF MISFORTUNE

As our survey moves toward the era of the European witch trials, let’s pause to remember the conditions of life for people prior to about 1800. Some have referred to this pre-industrial society as a “culture of misfortune,” in which death and catastrophe were routine occurrences.

In a time when half of all children died by age 10 (and half of those by age 1), when inexplicable illness could strike at any moment, when a freak hailstorm could destroy a year of agricultural work and everyone was one bad harvest away from hunger – any of these might set off a search for scapegoats.

Among Europe’s favored scapegoats were Jews, heretics, witches, and foreigners. Why witches were specially targeted after about 1500 will be discussed below.

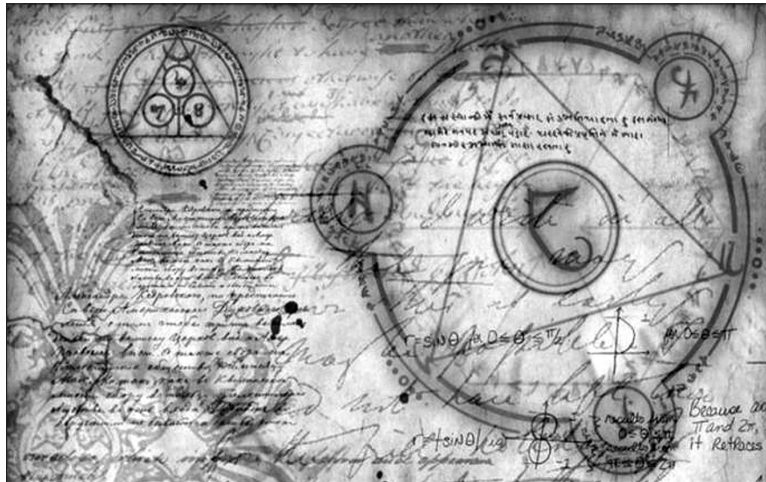
Extra-legal killings in times of crisis may have been more common than the scant records show, and the accusations might often have included witchcraft or magic used against one’s neighbors.

However, until the era of the witch hunts (discussed below), this did not lead to serial trials where each suspect was forced to accuse the next.

THE DEMONIZATION OF MAGIC C. 500 BCE TO 300 CE

Now let’s survey a longterm development that will become horrifyingly relevant around 1500 – the demonization of magic. This very brief overview will try to show how negative attitudes toward magic and alternative spiritual trends changed and hardened over two millennia, culminating in the era of the European witch hunts around 1500-1700.

Broadly speaking, in ancient polytheistic societies, people



Complex calculations characterize Arabic astral magic. Fortunately, we are no longer tested on this material in Elements of Magic classes.

were accustomed to encountering and even participating in a variety of spiritual practices. The practices of other people, especially foreigners, might be seen as alien, disturbing, or perhaps magical. The Greek term “magi” initially referred to Persian priests, eventually broadened to include foreign religious workers in general.

The diverse Mediterranean societies of the Hellenistic era (around 300-100 BCE) needed to practice religious tolerance in order to function. The common traditions of magic (see above) were shared and tolerated, and would have been feared only when specific harmful effects were perceived.

During the Roman Imperial era (c. 100 BCE to 400 CE), when the entire Mediterranean world was politically and economically united, urban people regularly witnessed other rites and practices.

Roman authorities tolerated other religions – so long as the adherents didn’t cause disturbances and also made sacrifices to the official Roman pantheon (Jews, a sizeable minority in many parts of the Eastern Roman world, were granted an exemption).

When magic or alternative spirituality was persecuted, it was mainly because of a perceived threat to social order. The first persecutions of Christians seem to have been a combination of their refusing to honor Roman deities, coupled with Nero’s search for a scapegoat for the burning of Rome around 64 CE.

Laws against fraud or failed attempts at healing may have snared magical practitioners – but people were arrested for the harm they allegedly caused, not for their beliefs or general practices.

THE DEMONIZATION OF MAGIC C. 300 CE TO ABOUT 1500 CE

With the advent of Christianity, and especially after about 350 CE when it became the dominant religion in the late Roman Empire, views toward magic and alternative spirituality shifted. Let’s survey that change.

Up till about 300 CE, Roman, Greek, and other ancient Pagan religions were polytheistic. Foreign religions and deities could be regarded as equally powerful for their own devotees, as less powerful but still quite real, or as various names and aspects of one’s own deities.

Thus Greeks recognized Persian magi as powerful priests



A Medieval necromancer, following written instructions, invokes a demon within the bounds of a magical circle. Warning: Always read entire manual before attempting this procedure at home!

for their own society.

Assyrians seem to have seen other deities as real but less powerful (after all, which gods won the war?).

And the Romans said, “Your gods are really just different names for our gods!” With Greece this was carried so far that later generations see Greek and Roman deities as interchangeable – Rome simply took over Greek myths and legends and applied them to their own deities.

Judaism is an exceptional case, probably passing from monolatry (recognition of multiple deities but worship of only one) to full monotheism – ours is the only God, and yours either don’t exist or are demons.

Christianity took on this aspect of Jewish thought and added to it an essential element – organized state power. From about 380 CE forward, Christianity engaged in official campaigns to eradicate all vestiges of older “Pagan” practices. Persecutions were turned on adherents of older beliefs, sacred sites were closed and often destroyed, shrines were rebranded as temples, and spirits repurposed as angels or saints (or as demons – stay tuned!).

Historians debate the causes of this change, some noting that the far-flung Roman Empire seemed to demand more unity of belief than the diffuse Pagan systems could provide. Given the Empire’s tendency to break apart into civil wars and secessionist movements, what would unify people from Britain to Palestine, from the Danube

to North Africa? Maybe if everyone were compelled to believe in One True God...

Okay – but how does this connect to demonizing magic?

Suppose you are a Christian authority living in a diverse world with many surviving religions, cults, and practices. There's no way you are going to convince all those other people that their practices are empty and meaningless – they know better.

Christianity's answer – yes, your practices work – but only because you have invoked demons to assist you! Christian authorities such as Augustine didn't deny the power of spirits – rather, they condemned appeals to any spirit other than the Christian God as demonic magic.

Natural magicians (see above) argued: "We are simply unlocking hidden powers of nature that God created – what's demonic about that?"

Christian authorities led by Thomas Aquinas shot back: "You use verbal incantations – this proves you are actually appealing to a demonic spirit, whether you recognize this or not. All magic, all spells, all invocation of any power other than God implies an appeal to demonic power."

That's hard to answer – and will become very problematic when ordinary people start getting accused of invoking demons because they chant over medicinal herbs.

NORSE/GERMANIC TRADITIONS

C. 100 TO 1200 CE

As with Celts, Romans, and other ancient peoples, the Norse and Germanic groups were probably not homogeneous ethnic tribes, but ad hoc networks of peoples living north and west of the Rhine.

Roman-era writers such as Tacitus (around 100 CE) describe the Germans (aka "barbarians,") as nomadic warrior and trading peoples with no settled (ie, urban or village) culture. Archaeologists have found few permanent settlements from the Roman period. Small artworks similar to Celtic metalwork have been found in graves, along with luxury goods and artifacts from southern cultures.

Spared the civil wars and invasions of the late Roman and early Medieval era, northern trader/marauders (sometimes called Vikings) moved south into old Roman areas and conquered Normandy, Sicily, Britain, and also the North of Russia by about 1100 CE. A network of Northern trading cities, the Hanseatic League, was among the strongest economic regions of the West by 1200.

Beginning around 800 CE, Norse explorers began to settle Iceland. This tiny island, insulated from outside influences for long periods, gave birth around 1100 CE to a series of

poems and prose writings known as the Eddas. These epics describe the dysfunctional familial relations of Norse deities and heroes, along with a striking vision of the end of the world.

Runes are simple symbols which may have been part of alphabets used to write Germanic languages before the adoption of Latin script. Some Medieval texts attribute magical power to the runes – in the poem Havamal, Odin recounts a runic spell that can cause a corpse to speak. While the runes are sometimes used today for divination, there is little older evidence for this practice, and no written transmission of meanings.

Political overtones – white supremacists have for the past century adopted certain (usually male) members of Norse pantheons as their semi-official deities. This malleability is not unique to Norse deities, but in today's rapidly evolving cultural mix it presents a special challenge to social justice and anti-racist organizers.

What We Inherit: Written down in relatively recent times, the tales of the Norse pantheon offer a coherent mythological framework with psychologically complex narratives. While some WitchCamps and local groups have avoided Norse myths due to political complexities, goddesses such as Freya have found a place in Reclaiming, and Winter WitchCamp especially engages with these deities and traditions.

Runes are popular today as divination tools and meditation sigils. Explanations of rune meanings in accompanying books are modern, intuitive interpretations.

GRIMOIRES

C. 1200 TO THE PRESENT

The word "grimoire" is a catch-all term covering everything from personal spell books to obsessively-detailed instructions for invoking angels and demons, and everything in between.

The Book of Abramelin, The Key of Solomon, and the Sworn Book of Honorius are a few grimoires from the Medieval or Early Modern era. Each purports to offer step-by-indecipherable-step instructions on how to invoke spirits and compel them to do your bidding, find buried treasure, and/or grant your heart's desires.

Alchemical texts are grimoires of a sort – and like the elaborate invocatory manuals, you have to wonder if anyone ever seriously performed these rites, or if they were concocted to dupe gullible aristocrats.

Around 1950, Wiccan pioneer Gerald Gardner applied the term "Book of Shadows" to his personal magical notebook (later edited and published by Doreen Valiente).

From Gardner the term spread, eventually popping up on television, in movies, and especially in books for teen witches.

Today the terms grimoire and Book of Shadows are used interchangeably by many people for a personal collection of magical spells, workings, instructions, jokes, and miscellaneous wisdom of varying practical value – a combination magical journal and compendium.

What We Inherit: The book you are reading is a descendent of grimoires. Like them, we're sharing intricate details of how we actually do magic.

As we feel about older grimoires, people in the future will probably consider our whole project a bit wacky. Ah, well – at least they'll know we existed. And what is remembered lives.

HERBOLOGY FROM PRE-HISTORY TO THE INDUSTRIAL ERA

From time before history people have gathered herbs and other plants for cooking, medicine, dyes, rituals, and other uses.

One old source for popular herbalism, a 16th century "Book of Secrets" attributed to the long-dead Albertus Magnus, promises to reveal the hidden virtues of herbs, stones, and various marvels of the world.

In Homer's *Odyssey*, the wise woman Circe (often described as a sorceress) mixed unspecified plants with cheese and honey and used them to turn Odysseus's crew into pigs. Helen of Troy is described as putting a drug into cups of wine that quieted all pain and strife for the rest of the day – with a suggestion that she knew a thing or two about using "cunning drugs" to manipulate people.

As these examples illustrate, knowledge about and gathering of herbs has been women's work since ancient times. This was unquestioned in Europe and around the Mediterranean up to about 1500.

Around that time, university-trained physicians began campaigning to limit and eventually outlaw herbalists, midwives, and other natural healers. In law and elite society, herbalism and popular remedies were seen as backward and superstitious.

Despite official pronouncements, most people would have continued to rely on popular healers and techniques they had long known. Through the early modern period (c. 1500ff), women offering such services were increasingly harassed by authorities.

That 1500-1750 is also the period of the European witch hunts is noteworthy, and has led some to posit a strong

connection – that the hunts were at least partly aimed at eliminating independent women's voices and practices.

It is undeniable that some strands of witch hunting, exemplified by the *Malleus Malificarum* (a popular and luridly misogynist inquisitors' manual), were obsessed with the power of women.

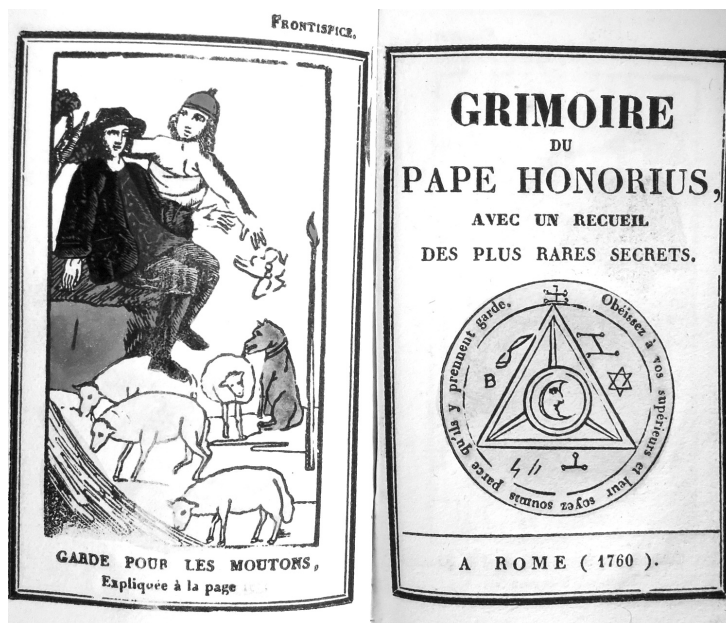
However, scholarly opinion today is skeptical about "repressing powerful women" as a

major motivating factor in the witch hunts.

We'll settle for noting that the hunts targeted older women – keepers of much of society's oral wisdom – precisely at a time when male-dominated academia was driving these women out of medical practices.

What We Inherit: Herbalism is stronger today than in a couple of centuries. Skills are openly taught and herbs can (mostly) be legally obtained, although conflicts still arise with mainstream medicine and regulations.

The idea that the witch hunts aimed at suppressing independent women was very popular in the feminist circles that gave birth to Reclaiming and other Pagan groups of the 1970s and 80s. People proudly claimed the label "witch," taking the word to mean powerful, nonconformist women (and eventually people of all genders).



This once-famous grimoire from the 1700s purports to be written by Pope Honorius III (d.1227). King Solomon (supposedly c. 1000 BCE) is also credited with authoring a notorious book of spirit invocations that actually dates from around 1500 CE. The Key of Solomon was translated into English and edited by MacGregor Mathers of the Golden Dawn.

PART III: RENAISSANCE MAGIC

THE RENAISSANCE

ITALY, 1400–1520

The Modern era opens with two broad cultural trends – the Renaissance and the Reformation. Neither was a single chain of events, and neither can be easily summarized. We'll focus on how they've influenced us.

The Renaissance, narrowly defined, spans Northern Italy from about 1400 to 1520. Artists and literary types fancied themselves as midwifing a “rebirth” of ancient art and letters. Architecture and sculpture adopted styles and motifs from ancient Rome. Painting (of which little survived from the ancient world) developed in a more visually realistic direction.

Interesting from our perspective is the revival of ancient Pagan stories and characters. Particularly in Florence, Pagan-inspired subjects appeared prominently in art for the first time in centuries – a trend that would grow to encompass all of Europe by the 1600s.

Expanding a Medieval trend, ancient texts continued to be discovered in libraries, translated, and published using the new moveable-type presses. Latin authors such as Ovid and Virgil achieved new fame, and with them the old Mediterranean myths, never totally lost, rose again to prominence.

Renaissance “humanism” emphasized human experience (as opposed to focusing on the divine), with special attention to human forms in art and humane values for society.

These trends radiated out from Italy over the following centuries and dominated European art and culture through the late 1800s.

What We Inherit: Our familiarity with many Graeco-Roman myths and deities stems from this re-invigoration. Our culture's general sense of “refined” art – whether to be pursued or revolted against – stems from the Renaissance.

Ecological thought has expanded humanism to encompass all life on our planet.

THE HERMETIC TEXTS

Let's back up and weave another thread from the Mediterranean world of the late Roman era.

Around 300 CE, Constantine – the same emperor who legalized Christianity – decided that the capital at Rome was too distant from the most economically valuable areas of the Empire – particularly Egypt, a trade entrepot

and a major source of grain for the empire's cities. He built a new capital known as Constantinople (today Istanbul), and moved most of the government there.

The Roman Empire soon dissolved into two relatively independent areas – the East based in Constantinople, and the West still ruled from Italy (Rome and later Milan and Ravenna).

By 600, the West had crumbled into smaller states and dependencies. The East remained controlled by Constantinople, and came to be called Byzantium.

As we have seen, in the mid-600s, Islam rapidly conquered the Middle East, Egypt, and North Africa. Most of Spain became Islamic by 800. Byzantium, although still powerful, was reduced mainly to the Balkans and Greece. For the next half millennium this was the political situation.

During this period, Western Europe was the least developed of these regions. Byzantium continued the Latin and Greek traditions of ancient times. Islam inherited the Greek traditions of the East and especially Alexandria, and far outstripped Western Europe in literature, philosophy, science – and magic.

Some of this wisdom filtered through to the West, particularly via Spain, a meeting ground for Islam, Judaism, and Christianity.

When Turkish armies captured Constantinople around 1453, Greek scholars fled to the West, bringing with them many ancient texts long lost to the Latin world. Among these were numerous dialogs of Plato.

But even more incredible were the Hermetic texts from Alexandria – so called because some of the dialogs include the Graeco-Egyptian god Hermes Trismegistus.

Today dated to around 200 CE, the writings were long believed to be from ancient Egypt – older than Homer, older than Moses. They were called “priscia theologia” – first or pristine theology, a direct revelation from God.

The short pieces – most of them unknown in Latin-speaking Europe from the fall of Rome until the Renaissance – contain ruminations on the origins of the universe, the meaning of human existence, and communion with divinity.

For the next century and beyond, the Hermetic texts influenced Western philosophical and spiritual circles with a vision of ancient truth that might unify the West's many bickering religions.

What We Inherit: Although today we are more likely

to look to nature and community than ancient texts for inspiration, we share a desire to find the “original truth,” to get back to the core of connection to spirit.

We also share with most humans the deep-seated fantasy that somewhere out there, someone knows the “real” truth about life!

MEDIEVAL & RENAISSANCE ALCHEMY C. 1000 TO 1700

Let’s pick up the thread of alchemy that we introduced in ancient times. During the Medieval period, alchemical and chemical studies flourished in Islamic areas. Manuscripts were occasionally translated from Arabic into Latin, intriguing scholars such as Gerbert of Aurillac, who became Pope Sylvester II in 999.

The interest in ancient texts that characterized the later Middle Ages and Renaissance, coupled with the advent of moveable-type printing around 1450, led to a profusion of “scientific” books, not least alchemical treatises. Many survive, illustrated with obscure and fascinating drawings and diagrams (Carl Jung discusses these graphics from a psycho-spiritual point of view in his book on alchemy). Some of these texts are so obtuse and convoluted that one suspects their main function was to defraud gullible aristocrats.

Around 1600 the notion of personal and collective transmutation flowered in the mysterious Rosicrucian writings (as obscure as any alchemical treatise), which seem to have been connected to an anti-authoritarian political movement aimed at abolishing the Holy Roman Empire and promoting local religious and political autonomy.

The Rosicrucian vision of a world of tolerance and peace was crushed during the Thirty Years War.

Yet the dream of chemical transmutation and the synthesis of the philosopher’s stone persisted, attracting such notables as famed scientific innovator Isaac Newton, who devoted major efforts to alchemy.

The skepticism of the Enlightenment, coupled with the rise of modern experimental science, finally laid to rest the arcane formulae of alchemy. Practical skills such as distillation, metallurgy,

and manufacture of dyes paved the way to modern chemistry and other sciences.

What We Inherit: Few present-day witches and magi maintain fully-equipped alchemical laboratories, and today’s aristocrats are notably parsimonious when it comes to patronizing esoteric researches.

Yet the alchemical vision remains, and continues to inspire people working to change the world – real change begins with the “prima materia” of today’s world, and seeks to transmute it through a series of purifying steps.

Good luck to us!

PROFESSIONALS AND WRITINGS

Many practices discussed in this article are considered “magic” only in retrospect – people at the time probably thought of herbs, incantations, and spells not as magic but as “what you do for this problem.” When a parent kisses a child’s bruise to “make it well,” we carry on this practice.

Renaissance magicians, on the other hand, claimed the title, and had little hesitation about monetizing their practices. Some, such as John Dee and Giordano Bruno, had intermittent success in finding employment at royal courts.

The development of moveable-type printing around 1450 greatly increased the dissemination of books and ideas around Europe. This period saw a flowering of alchemical writings, and various alchemists found patrons for their researches and profusely-illustrated books.

Astrological books and tables abounded, with William Lilly gaining fame by predicting the victory of the Parliamentary forces in the English Civil War of the 1640s.

Translations and editions of long-lost classical authors such as the transcendent spiritualist Plato and the materialist Lucretius challenged narrow aspects of Medieval European thought.

Learned magicians achieved great respect in some circles – but this trend came to an abrupt end around 1600, killed by a combination of religious war, the repressive Catholic



Hieronymus Bosch (d. 1516), in one of his more restrained moments, reminds us that illusion and stage tricks are part of magic

Counter-Reformation, and the growing scientific outlook of European intelligentsia after about 1650.

What We Inherit: Many modern traditions inherit the idea that magic can be openly taught and shared (and published in books!), and that it takes study and practice to get good at it.

RENAISSANCE MAGIC FOUR PERSONALITIES

Joan of Arc – Born in 1412, Joan is usually seen as a vestige of the Middle Ages. Of interest here are her claims to direct communications and visions from God. The channeled messages seemed to aid the French in defeating the occupying English forces, and Joan was seen as a miracle-worker. She was eventually captured by the English and executed as a heretic (and according to popular report, a “witch”), but an aura of sanctity and even magic has surrounded her ever since.

Paracelsus – Born 1493 in Switzerland, Paracelsus was educated as a medical doctor and also steeped in the Hermetic philosophy described above. He sought folk remedies and disdained the classical medical texts. Building on alchemical ideas, Paracelsus developed chemistry-based healing theories that were a forerunner of modern pharmaceuticals. In 1525 he was ejected from a teaching position at Salzburg for supporting the losing side in the German Peasants’ War.

Giordano Bruno – Born in Italy in 1548 and educated as a Dominican, Bruno developed elaborate theories about astral energy and magical methods for invoking it. He adopted the heliocentric model proposed by Copernicus, and carried it further by seeing each star as a sun, surrounded by planets with their own life. Bruno traveled Europe writing, lecturing, and generally alienating everyone he met. Toward 1590 he returned to Italy, supposedly to convert the Pope to his new magical ideas. This didn’t go well, and in 1600 Bruno was executed as a heretic.

John Dee – Born in Britain in 1527, Dee straddled the transition from magic to science, and probably did not draw a distinction between his mathematical career and his metaphysical and Hermetic researches. Dee attempted angelic communications and created the “Enochian” script with medium (and likely fraudster) Edward Kelley as part of a plan to revivify the wisdom of the ancients and heal the Protestant/Catholic breach. Around 1585 Dee traveled to Prague and had an audience with Emperor Rudolf II. The visit came to nothing, but may have inspired the Rosicrucian pamphlets that appeared in the next generation – pamphlets that called for a new spiritual era that transcended old divisions.

THE REFORMATION

C. 1500 TO 1650

Why are we delving into Christian history? It turns out that our Pagan traditions have roots in the Protestant movements.

The Protestant Reformation of the 1500s, associated with names such as Luther and Calvin, followed several centuries of unsuccessful localist movements including Waldensians, Hussites, and Wycliffites. Each of these was labeled heretical and violently repressed in the name of a unified Catholicism.

Around 1520, a faction of German states (Germany being divided into several hundred autonomous states only loosely federated as the Holy Roman Empire) backed the Lutheran movement, and soon several other state-backed Protestant groups had taken root in North-Central Europe. After a generation of ideological sparring, Central Europe collapsed into religious and civil wars.

The religious wars, particularly in the German states, provide the context for the witch hunts of the century from about 1550-1650. While the wars did not focus on witchcraft, the decades of devastation left people desperate and looking for scapegoats.

The Reformation highlighted the relation of the individual soul to God. Broadly speaking, the Catholic Church placed the relation in the hands of professional clergy who were authorized to perform sacramental-magical acts such as changing wine into the blood of Christ. These priests “mediated” people’s relationship to God.

Protestants emphasized the individual’s direct, “unmediated” relationship with God, primarily through prayer. The purpose of clergy was to teach and exhort.

Although these fundamental differences impacted European thought for the following several centuries, they made little difference as far as witch hunting. Luther and other reformers placed at least as much emphasis on demonic and satanic dangers as did Catholicism, and hunts happened under both Protestants and Catholics.

What We Inherit: The Protestant emphasis on a direct, personal relationship with deity has colored less-structured Pagan and Wiccan movements since about 1960.

Reclaiming and kindred groups explicitly state: “Each person is their own spiritual authority.” Priestesses function as facilitators and organizers, not mediators of the divine.

We also inherit the general Protestant disdain for centralized, hierarchical structures. Reclaiming grows out of a Protestant tradition of decentralized, autonomously-controlled local congregations and groups (see the Activist essay).

PART IV: THE EUROPEAN WITCH HUNTS

1450 TO 1750

THE WITCH HUNTS: WHAT/WHEN/WHERE/WHY

Now we come to a disturbingly fascinating period of our history. For people who today proudly claim the title “witch” or describe their work as “magic,” as well as communists, anarchists, and activists of various stripes, the hunts and trials stand as a stark reminder of the vulnerability of people on the margins of respectability.

What led various regions and localities of Europe to engage in prolonged searches for and trials of suspected Satan-worshipping witches?

Why did the hunts happen in this period, and not earlier or later? How does it connect to a broader pattern of scapegoating that pervades Western (and perhaps much of human) history?

Who were the victims? What did they have in common? How did they try to explain themselves?

In the bibliography at the end of this article I’ll recommend a short article and several longer studies which convey enough detail to illustrate the complicated and shifting patterns of the witch hunts.

Here we’ll survey some of the broad outlines.

First, some numbers. The total number killed is impossible to determine, partly because the number of alleged witches murdered by non-judicial “lynchings” can never be known. It is possible that some of the judicial witch hunts and trials began in response to lynchings, with authorities trying to re-establish control of violent situations.

However, 50 years of archival research allows at least a general sense of the scale. Numbers in the millions, once commonly cited, are badly mistaken – in fact, impossible, given the small population of Europe at the time.

Present-day scholars, after studying trial records across the continent, put the likely total of officially executed witches at between 40 and 60 thousand over the course of about three centuries.

Of these, over half were executed in German-speaking areas between about 1550 and 1650 – the period of the worst Protestant-Catholic wars, culminating in the Thirty

Years War that raged across Germany for a generation. Central authority collapsed, and nothing reined in local scapegoating rampages.

Some of the largest documented waves of executions occurred in the western German bishoprics of Trier, Mainz, and Cologne, where several thousand people were killed over the course of just a few decades around 1600.

These mini-states lacked strong central governments, and none was subject to an appellate court. When popular opinion and local of-

ficials ran amuck, there were no higher institutions to stop the momentum.

What about the Inquisition? Ironically, this disreputable body had a fairly good record during the witch hunts. The Roman Inquisition, controlled by the papacy, very early put an end to hearsay evidence, and demanded that all cases follow strict legal procedures. Although some witches (and the famed magician Giordano Bruno) were subsequently executed, no major hunts ensued in the Roman jurisdiction.

Similarly, the northern half of staunchly Catholic France, with the Paris Parlement acting as a sort of supreme court, demanded around 1500 that all capital cases be sent to Paris for judicial review. No major hunts happened in their jurisdiction after this point.

Hunts seem to have happened mainly in areas where central authority was weak or compromised by war. England’s



The ducking of a witch, from a chapbook by John Ashton (1834). Image via Wikimedia Commons.

worst period of witch-hunting was during the civil war of the 1640s. France's worst incidents were in outlying areas (Normandy, Lorraine) with no accountability to Paris.

THE WITCH HUNTS A SATANIC CONSPIRACY?

In the 1300s, several high-profile legal cases charged aristocrats with using magic to murder royalty. The Order of the Knights Templar was broken up after 1307, its leaders charged with obscene magical acts.

In the Middle Ages, clerics and other educated people (mostly men) were occasionally prosecuted for magic, demonic rituals, and the like (see "learned traditions," above).

These upper-class cases remained isolated. When the great hunts emerged in the 1400s, the victims were overwhelmingly ordinary people – often elderly women from the fringes of society.

Did the victims actually call themselves witches? Unless they were insane, probably not. As Ronald Hutton has established, the term "witch" has in the past mainly been used on other people, not one's self. To be identified as a witch was dangerous, possibly lethal.

Initial accusations often came from neighbors and other common folk – but took on the nature of "hunts" and mass executions when church and state got involved.

Witchcraft had long been persecuted and punished as heresy. The final step in justifying the witch hunts was the growth of the idea of a satanic conspiracy to destroy Christendom.

Unlike earlier eras where a single person or small group was accused of using evil magic, cases after about 1450 often included charges of participating in the (sexually-charged) rituals of devil-worshipping cults, and suspects were tortured until they admitted to being part of a satanic conspiracy and named other participants.

This obsession with groups or sects of witches parallels the success of breakaway Protestant sects during the Reformation – heresy was seen as a group vice, not an individual deviance. (Protestants themselves were no different, demonizing one another and the Roman church.)

How did the everyday magical acts of common people get caught in this dragnet? We saw above the gradual "demonization" of magic. Where older cultures saw magic as problematic only when harm was done or perceived, the later Middle Ages developed the idea that *all* magical acts were demonic, in that they must invoke a conscious spiritual being in order to accomplish their effects.

Combined with the belief that witches (and all heretics) must belong to secret cults and sects, this seems to have

led authorities to launch "hunts" to eradicate heresy, deviance, and witchcraft. Official Christianity seemed under attack, and authorities looked for scapegoats.

In some ages, these scapegoats might be Jews, or Gypsies, or foreigners in general. Jews and Moslems were driven from Spain in 1492.

Around 1500, tensions focused on witches, and often on older women. Why this happened at this time remains a complex question.

THE WITCH HUNTS WHY WERE OLDER WOMEN TARGETED?

Archival research confirms that a large majority of witches and magicians executed during the period of the great hunts were women. In some places they made up 90 percent of victims.

To account for the high percentage of women persecuted and killed during this era, it has been popular since historian Jules Michelet in the mid-1800s to cite the deep-grained misogyny of Christian churches (Protestant and Catholic) as the driving force behind the hunts.

Although Christian attitudes couldn't have helped matters, we're left wondering why the witch hunts happened around 1500 instead of, say, 500 or 1000 CE, when attitudes were just as misogynist?

And why did the Roman Inquisition lead most jurisdictions in curbing the hunts? Something further must have been involved.

Social factors probably played a role. Earlier we discussed herbalism – a gendered field occupied mainly by women. In Western societies prior to about 1500, the day-to-day healthcare and healing of most people was in the hands of older women. The rare university-educated male physicians treated royalty and aristocrats (often to their detriment).

We know from other sources that educated doctors campaigned during this period to ban women from practicing medicine and even midwifery.

Women were also displaced from positions of economic importance as early capitalist production began to move out of home workshops.

These and other factors may have rendered older women less essential to town and village societies, and heightened gender tensions right at a moment when other conflicts and disasters were leading people across Central Europe to look for scapegoats.

For more on this complex topic, see the bibliography at the end of this article.

THE WITCH HUNTS

WHY IN THESE TIMES AND PLACES?

Why were witches particularly persecuted – and accused of a satanic conspiracy, no less – at these particular times and places? Let's focus on the century around 1550-1650 and ask – why did the worst excesses happen then, and why mainly in north-central Europe?

Factors to examine include:

- the Protestant Reformation (1517ff), which challenged centuries-old patterns of authority and spawned two centuries of religious wars.
- Christianity's centuries of demonizing magic and developing a conception of a vast anti-Christian conspiracy.
- the early stages of the capitalist upheaval, which unsettled social relations and economic patterns.
- misogynistic trends aggravated by incipient capitalism, including displacement of the home as a production site and devaluation of the role of women in production and reproduction.
- climatic trends including a "little ice age" around 1550, which led to diminished harvests.
- wider scientific and technological trends, including the development of moveable-type printing around 1450, European discovery of the Western hemisphere around 1500, and the Copernican revolution beginning around 1530.

These trends contributed to an atmosphere of displacement and unpredictable change. Place this in a "culture of misfortune" as described above, add the religious wars in northern Europe and especially Germany beginning around 1550, and we have some possible explanations for why the trials happened when they did.

This may account for the timing – but why witches, and not, say, Jews? This was demographics. Where Jews were

found in sizeable numbers, as in the city-state of Trier, they were also targeted.

Witches, on the other hand, could be found anywhere, in whatever quantities were desired.

THE WITCH HUNTS

HOW THEY ENDED

As noted above, the large-scale witch hunts seem to have happened mostly in areas where government authority was weak or compromised. As the worst of the religious wars wound down around 1650, central governments reasserted power.

Hunts were avoided or ended earliest in areas with strong central authority – the papal jurisdictions covered by the Roman Inquisition, the North of France covered by the Paris Parlement.

Broadly speaking, the hunts moved West to East, beginning and ending earlier in Western Europe. This parallels the earlier evolution of strong governments in the West.

Developments described below such as the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment led to growth of a general skepticism about the possibility of magic or witchcraft. By 1700, most educated Europeans considered even self-confessed witches to be deluded people incapable of doing real harm. Church authorities promoting witch hunts were considered ignorant and backward, a trope that Voltaire built his career on.

By 1750 the hunts and most official executions had ended. A new era had arrived in which magic was not persecuted, but ridiculed.

What We Inherit: A somewhat morbid fascination with witches as counter-cultural icons par excellence, coupled with a realistic concern that political and religious "witch hunts" continue – not least the U.S., where a "satanic abuse" hysteria spread as recently as the 1980s (investigations turned up no actual cases.)

The anti-communist crusade around 1950 ("McCarthyism") derailed many lives and featured one of the worst aspects of witch hunts – suspects being coerced into giving the names of others.



A German illustration of the Mora witch trial, Sweden 1669. Fourteen women and one man were decapitated and their bodies burned.

PART V: AN AGE OF SCIENCE

MAGIC GOES UNDERGROUND

After several centuries of witch hunts, followed by growing skepticism and anti-spiritual thought, magic was in sad shape.

Isaac Newton (d. 1727) was one of the last European intellectuals who pursued magic as a serious vocation. His manuscripts reveal deep interest in alchemy and biblical numerology – deciphering the secrets of the Hebrew scriptures by assigning numerical values to words and letters.

French writer and social activist Voltaire, two generations younger (and himself a major propagator of Newton's scientific ideas), laid into spirituality and dogma with such witty venom that by mid-century most forms of magic had gone underground.

Alchemical researches continued, and we'll see below how Tarot was "rediscovered" around 1780. But many prominent writers of the period tended to be skeptical, even materialist (Diderot, D'Holbach).

During the early 1800s, in the wake of the apparent defeat of the French Revolution and Napoleon, Europe saw a spiritual revival. The milieu was reactionary and often royalist – a political bent that typified some later magical writers and did nothing to engage advanced thinkers.

What We Inherit: Many of us came to magic and Paganism as adults, having grown up in a society and educational system that ridicules such beliefs and practices. Among political radicals, all forms of spiritual interest can be suspect as "opiates of the masses."

This gives rise to the expression, "in the broom closet" – borrowing metaphor and practice from our GLBTQ allies, we find ourselves revealing our magical inclinations to people one at a time, and keeping it veiled from others – often including our families.

THE SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION

We won't trace the development of modern science here, but simply note a few aspects that pertain to our tradition.

A huge shift between about 1200 and 1700 saw the development of an experimental approach to knowledge. Earlier exemplars such as Roger Bacon (d. 1292, Oxford) can be found, but the dominant approach around 1200

was a close study and critique of past authorities. A new manuscript or a fresh interpretation meant more than observation of the world.

By 1700, this had largely changed. Galileo, Harvey, and Newton redefined knowledge to answer to the demand that theory be validated by observation and experiment.

The results have been spectacular – an end to famine, cures for diseases, and a standard of living (in much of the West, at least) that our ancestors never dreamed possible.

Till about 1930 this approach passed virtually unchallenged. Subsequent developments including world war, holocaust, atomic weapons, and environmental degradation have raised questions about the unbridled (and profit-driven) development of experimental science, divorced from a humane vision or ethical concerns.

What We Inherit: Reclaiming folks (and many Neo-Pagans) tend to be science-based, sharing a broad skepticism about old-style magic such as levitation or shape-shifting. This has led some people to redefine "magic" to mean social and personal transformation.

Our approach to magic and ritual tend to be "experimental," in that we try to intuitively read the energy of the moment and improvise, more than consulting authorities or past scripts.

TAROT: DIVINATION FOR THE PEOPLE!

Let's pick up the divinatory thread again. Around 1350, playing cards were introduced into Europe, probably from the Islamic Middle East. Their ultimate source may have been India or China. Old legends of Gypsy or Egyptian origins have been discredited. (No one has yet debunked the theory that aliens created them.)

The earliest European cards seem already to have included four suits of ten numbered cards as well as three or four court cards per suit.

Around 1440, Italian game-players and artists added a series of additional cards which today we call the Major Arcana, and created the game of Tarocchi (google for more information and rules).

The additional cards functioned as trumps – later replaced by designating one of the four suits as trump, as we do today.

Unlike professional practices such as entrail reading

which require years of arduous study, anyone can intuitively read Tarot images – a magical tool for the people!

Tarot cards were used for divination and other purposes quite early. In one account from the later 1400s, the cards were used not to predict the future, but to describe people at a party. A card was assigned to each person, and others would say why they thought it applied or not.

The earliest modern divinatory use of Tarot cards seems to be in the 1700s, probably by popular fortune tellers (hence the Gypsy legends). A common deck at that time (still available today) was the Tarot de Marseilles. Historian Ronald Decker conjectures that popular interpretations of the Minor Arcana (ie, the cards 1 to 10 in each suit) may be indirectly derived from Cabalistic discussions of the hidden meanings of the ten sephora of the Tree of Life.

Around 1780, a minor French aristocrat named Court de Gebelin came across the cards and concluded that they were a pictorial form of the Egyptian Book of the Dead, passed secretly through the ages. The idea that the cards conceal ancient wisdom has been with us ever since.

Several writers expounded magical theories about Tarot during the 1800s, notably Eliphas Levi, who integrated Tarot and the numerology of the 22 Hebrew letters to “discover” interpretations of the 22 Major Arcana (an approach rejected by scholars like Decker, who see other sources for the Majors).

This ethereal theorizing culminated with the Golden Dawn (see below). Around 1900, amateur scholar Arthur Waite and graphic artist Pamela Colman Smith created an intricate yet accessible deck that has become “the” iconic Tarot. Originally called the Rider-Waite deck (Rider was the first publisher), today it is often called the Smith-Waite deck.

Tarot continued to bubble underground through the early 1900s, with eccentric writer Aleister Crowley and painter Frieda Harris creating the well-known Thoth deck around 1938.

With the advent of the new age movement in the 1960s and 1970s, Tarot exploded. Decks and books multiplied, readers emerged from the shadows, and scholars began to study the 500-year trajectory of this colorful magical tool.

What We Inherit: Tarot is widely used among Reclaiming folks for discernment and insight – we do a reading to help with a decision, or to show us various perspectives on an issue. Some rituals are built around a Tarot reading.

Much of our reading is intuitive – we read the images directly, not book-meanings. We look to Tarot not so much for answers as to help clarify possibilities.

We also do a working known as the Journey of the Fool, where we use Tarot cards to map out a spiritual quest.

See Workings: Tarot (forthcoming).

THE ENLIGHTENMENT: THE RISE OF SKEPTICISM

The 1700s in Western Europe are known as the Enlightenment – a period that built on the scientific revolution to develop a secular, critical approach to many facets of society.

Writers such as Voltaire and Montesquieu turned harsh eyes on traditional political institutions, a trend that culminated in the French Revolution of 1789. Diderot and others developed early evolutionary theories, debunking older (and official Christian) theories of God-created, unchanging species.

Many aspects of traditional spirituality and magic came under fire as well – in Keith Thomas’s phrase, the world was disenchanted.

As mentioned above, the harshest weapon was ridicule. Aside from a vague deism in which God created the world and disappeared, belief in spirituality and metaphysics became tokens of ignorance, backwardness, and lack of critical thinking.

What We Inherit: Contemporary Paganism exists in a skeptical, a-spiritual society. Tell a non-Pagan that you are a witch, and you get “that smile.” Tell an educated person that you do magic, and watch them awkwardly change the topic.

Actually, you’ll get the same reaction if you tell someone that you are a revolutionary.

Awkward smiles aside, is there a deeper level at which we don’t take ourselves seriously?

Do we secretly discount the idea that magic (and a good deal of hard work) can actually create a peaceful, beneficent, sustainable world?

What do we believe we can accomplish with all this ritual and magic stuff? Enquiring minds would like to know!



The Star card from one of the many variants known as the Tarot of Marseilles, a 1700s deck actually from Northern Italy.

FREEMASONRY: CEREMONY & INITIATION 1600-1900

Amidst an era of science and skepticism, Freemasonry, tracing its mythical roots to Medieval craft guilds, was re-founded as a network of fraternal lodges. From probable roots in Scotland around 1600, the movement of secret initiatory societies spread to England and then across Europe and its colonies, reaching Pennsylvania as early as 1715.

Independent of central authority, the local lodge forms the basis of Masonry. Each lodge elects its own officers and follows its own schedule. Lodges also function as social, mutual support, and charitable organizations. Traditionally, lodges have accepted only free (non-slave or servant) white males.

Egyptian and Graeco-Roman motifs are common in lodges and rituals, along with ceremonial trappings such as processions, altars, and robes.

Candidates for admission are initiated through a series of grades or degrees. Varying from place to place, the initiations often involve knowledge of craft tools, practices, or history, as well as specific ceremonies for each degree. During initiations, members are often required to swear fidelity to the lodge and its covenants, as well as never to reveal Masonic secrets to outsiders.

The founders of many later traditions including the Golden Dawn were first trained in Freemasonry.

What We Inherit: Freemasonry provides a ceremonial and initiatory framework followed by many later traditions, most prominently the Golden Dawn, which passed them on to early Wiccan groups.

Masonic lodges also modeled the creation of a network of voluntary societies outside the control of either church or state.

Anarchist-type groups such as Reclaiming (with no formal membership or graded series of initiations) have deliberately avoided many of the formal structures and hierarchies inherited from Freemasonry.

ROMANTICISM: AN INTUITIVE RESPONSE Early 1800s

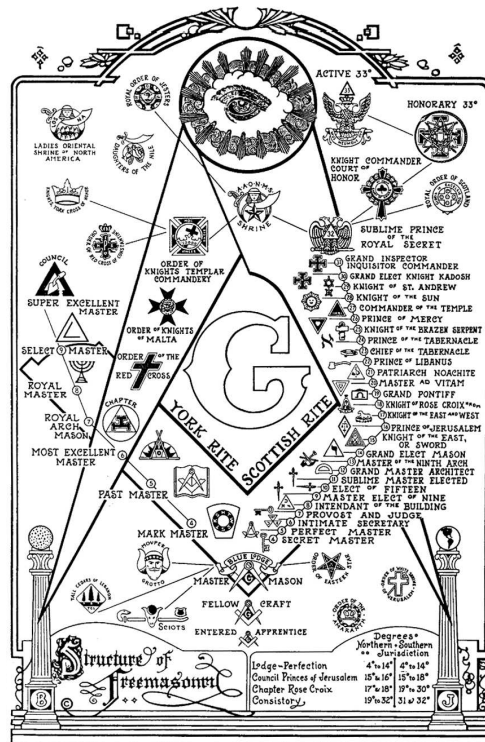
The so-called Romantic era blossomed following the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Partly a conservative reaction to the upheaval of the past decades, Romanticism elevated intuition and feeling to an equal position with reason.

Foreshadowed by Goethe and Rousseau, writers such as Jane Austen and Walter Scott took the “romantic” novel to heights never surpassed.

Goddess-infused topics colored the works of poets like Keats and Shelley.

Folklore – this era saw the development of folklore movements which recorded stories and legends that literate society had long ignored. These were presented as the timeless heritage of an unchanging rural past. The Grimm Brothers’ fairy tale collections date from this time, as do writers such as Bullfinch who systematized the chaotic jumble of ancient Greek and Roman sources into coherent, linear narratives.

What We Inherit: Our access to folk and fairy tales stems from the research of this era. Many of us first encountered Greek myths via Bullfinch and his progeny. We tend to take Romantic-era versions of tales and myths as “traditional.”



This diagram showing the structure of Freemasonry incorporates symbols such as the compass, the square, and the twin pillars from Solomon's Temple.

HEGEL & HISTORICAL RELATIVISM

This profound and obtuse thinker paved the way for what is sometimes called “historicism” or “historical relativism” – the idea that historical movements can best be understood in the context of their own times, and philosophies and customs that seem irrational or convoluted to us may have made perfect sense in their day.

Hegel also propounded a developmental view of history, in which humankind is spiritually evolving toward perfection and God-awareness – in other words, evolving into complete agreement with Hegel's system!

The rest of the 1800s see one long reaction to Hegel – Marx's materialist interpretation, Nietzsche's individualist rebellion, Kierkegaard's angsty existentialism...

What We Inherit: Both cultural relativism and a developmental view of history are deep influences on our views of human spirituality – as is angsty existentialism!

PART VI: A REBIRTH OF MAGIC

ELIPHAS LEVI

Almost forgotten today, Eliphas Levi (born 1810 as Alphonse Louis Constant) was the foremost French occult writer of the later 1800s, and deeply influenced Theosophy and the Golden Dawn.

A former Roman Catholic seminarian, he Hebraicized his first and middle names after leaving school and undertaking study of the Cabbalah, Hermeticism, and Renaissance magic. His highly intellectual blend was the most sophisticated exposition of this tradition since the time of Isaac Newton (c. 1700).

From Marsilio Ficino and Arabic magicians he adapted the idea of an “astral light” or fluid that permeates all being. It is by controlling and manipulating this fluid that the magician operates.

In his book *High Magic: Its Doctrine & Ritual* (also called *Transcendental Magic*), Levi correlates Cabbalah, the Hermetic writings, alchemy, and smatterings of ancient Egyptian and Greek traditions in a structure based on the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet – which conveniently correlate with the 22 Major Arcana of the Tarot deck.

Read as a Tarot manual, the book still offers provocative insights on the various Majors, and illustrates Levi’s syncretic ideal – the various types of Western esoterica are so many paths to a unified higher truth.

Levi also drew a famous image of a goat-devil that he identified with Baphomet, allegedly worshiped by heretical Knights Templar in the Middle Ages. This fascination with the devil betrays Levi’s Christian background.

What We Inherit: As Levi taught, the various strands of Western magic are taken today as all tending toward one goal – spiritual enlightenment. Writers such as Jung and Gardner have been influenced by this unified approach to

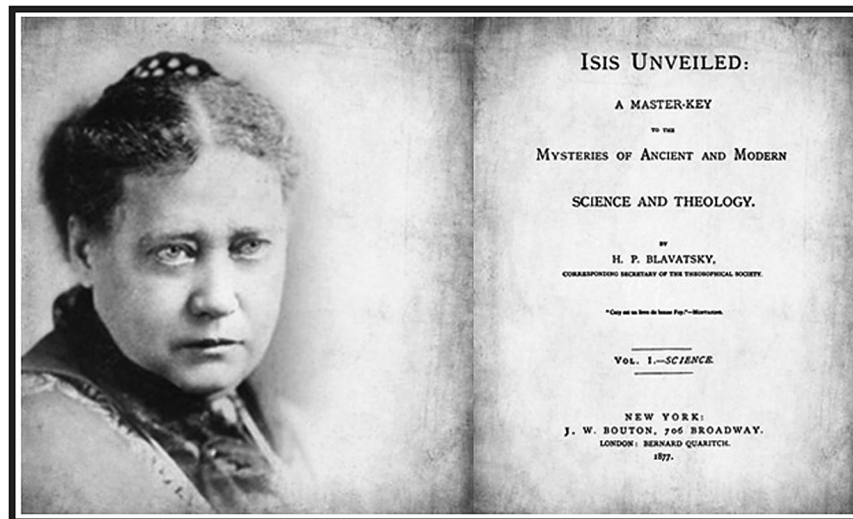
the various threads and traditions.

Levi’s Hebrew-numerological interpretations of the Tarot Majors influenced Waite and Smith, and through them many subsequent decks. Ironically, modern Tarot scholars see this association of Hebrew letters and Tarot Majors as stemming not from an older tradition, but from Eliphas Levi himself.

HELENA BLAVATSKY & THEOSOPHY

Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891) was a Russian-born metaphysical savant, author, and co-founder of the Theosophical Society.

According to her own accounts, she traveled to India around 1850, where she encountered a group of spiritual masters who guided her development and teachings. These masters (she claimed) taught that beneath all human religions runs a single current of ancient wisdom, recover-



Wisdom advises not to make jokes at the expense of the formidable Madame Blavatsky, who may still be watching over us.

able via esoteric traditions both Western and Eastern.

Active as a medium in the Spiritualist movement, Blavatsky asserted that the spirits contacted in séances and other ceremonies were not those of dead humans, but of other spiritual beings. Something of a pantheist (“all being is divine”), Blavatsky referred to God as the root of all, from which all proceeds and into which all shall be absorbed at the end of the great cycle of being.

Her early thought was influenced by the Hermetic and Caballistic mix of Eliphas Levi, and she aimed to form a universal “brotherhood” of humanity as well as investigating the unexplained laws of nature.

In 1875 Blavatsky and others formed the Theosophical Society, which especially after she relocated to India in 1879 became a vehicle for introducing Eastern thought to the West. She was an early European convert to Buddhism.

Politically, she advocated for women's rights and leadership, but also propagated racist and anti-Semitic stereotypes of her day.

Annie Besant – Blavatsky's successor as head of the Theosophical Society was Annie Besant (1847-1933), an ardent suffragette and an important voice for Indian independence. She was also involved in the early 20th century movement known as Co-Masonry, which unlike Freemasonry admitted women to its ranks.

Besant claimed clairvoyant abilities, which she and others used to explore the secrets of the universe and the history of humankind. She co-authored a book called *Occult Chemistry* which traces her psychic explorations of natural phenomena.

What We Inherit: Blavatsky and Besant were early feminist influences on magical thought. Their notion that underlying the multitude of spiritual traditions runs a single core of divinity is sometimes expressed as, "One Goddess, many names." Theosophy's blending of science and spiritual studies influences modern Wiccan beliefs. Most of all, Theosophy helped introduce Eastern currents into Western spirituality.

HERMETIC ORDER OF THE GOLDEN DAWN

c. 1890-1900

No magical group or tendency ever got better press than the Golden Dawn. In existence barely a decade and consisting of about 200 members at its peak, the group left a radiant legacy of magical organizing that persists to this day.

The story of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn is replete with forged documents, cryptic messages from secret masters, and enough betrayals to populate a whole series of pulp novels.

When they weren't busy forging founding documents or bitterly denouncing one another, the self-chosen leaders of the Golden Dawn drew up a whole panoply of rituals in which initiates advanced by stages similar to Freemasonry toward ever-higher revelations. Several temples were formed around England and in Paris.

At first the Golden Dawn was conceived as a study group, where initiates learned about past magical systems such as Kabbalah and Hermeticism as they worked through the series of graded ceremonies. Although the leadership was male, women were initiated on equal terms.

Soon, a second "inner" order was established with the intent of actually practicing magic. While their amalgam is influenced by the multi-layered magical theories of Eliphas Levi, the Golden Dawn was one of the first modern organizations to attempt to revive and practice older systems of magic on an initiatory basis.

As the group fractured around 1900, a young Aleister Crowley attempted to force his way into the inner order, resulting in desultory legal proceedings and publicity that led most members to abandon the group. Despite various recriminations and accusations of fraud, most of the

Golden Dawn rituals remained closely guarded secrets until they were published by former initiate Israel Regardie in the 1930s.

What We Inherit: The Golden Dawn serves more as a general inspiration to create a practicing magical society than in its details. Reclaiming and kindred groups do not have graded levels of initiation, and our rituals and teachings are neither scripted nor secret.

Our modern quilt of Western esoteric practices owes more to Eliphas Levi than to the Golden Dawn, although the latter group continued this trend.

Perhaps we inherit a touch of the Golden Dawn's self-importance.



The Sacred Magic of Abramelin, edited and translated by MacGregor Mathers of the Golden Dawn. The illustration shows the ancient Sator Arepo square. The palindrome was found in the ruins at Herculaneum, destroyed by Mt. Vesuvius in 79 CE.

JAMES FRAZER

James Frazer (Scottish, 1854-1941), was an anthropologist and folklorist who wrote the hugely influential *The Golden Bough*

(1890), a study of comparative mythology and religion.

Frazer was among the first to connect magic, myth, and ritual to broader cultural development. Following Hegel, Frazer saw cultures progressing through several stages: from magic to religion to science. Magic and myth, in Frazer's schema, constituted early (failed) attempts to understand nature and reality.

Frazer saw older religions as fertility cults that revolved around the worship and periodic sacrifice of a sacred king. The king was the incarnation of a solar deity who underwent a mystic marriage to a goddess of the Earth. He died at the harvest and was reincarnated in the Spring. Frazer saw this legend of rebirth as central to most world mythologies.

This theory was not borne out by closer readings of specific myths, and over the long run, scholars rejected most of Frazer's theories. However, he had a major influence on Western poetry and literature via writers such as T. S. Eliot, H. P. Lovecraft, Carl Jung, and Joseph Campbell.

What We Inherit: Frazer is a major source of the interpretation of seasonal rituals in terms of the death-and-rebirth of a solar god, a view that was still quite popular in Reclaiming's early days (although we interpreted the key dates as the Solstices, not the Equinoxes).

We inherit the idea of magic as primitive science (still a common definition), and Frazer probably influenced the view of Samhain (Halloween) as the "new year of the witches."

ROBERT GRAVES

Poet and author (British, 1895-1985) of *The White Goddess* (1948). Building on Frazer's ideas, Graves proposed the pre-historical worship of a Europe-wide deity, the White Goddess of Birth, Love, and Death, who lies behind the diverse goddesses of various Western mythologies.

Building on Romantic-era ideas, Graves saw Goddess worship as the original Western religion, analyzing it largely from literary evidence. In his eyes, myth and poetry spring from the ancient rituals of the White Goddess.

Graves (following Frazer) proposed a theory of myth and seasonal change, claiming that the mythological figure of the Holly King represents half of the year, while the other half is personified by the Oak King. The two battle ceaselessly as the seasons turn, and annual rituals commemorate this fight.

Later scholars have questioned Graves' grasp of European and Celtic history and culture. Hutton calls him "a major source of confusion about the ancient Celts."

What We Inherit: The idea of a prehistoric cult of a Mother Goddess known under many names, as well as a ritual cycle that emphasizes the drama of the changing seasons.



The Golden Bough, a painting by J. M. W. Turner that inspired Frazer's book of the same title.

DISTINGUISHED ANCESTORS

1800-1950

Let's pause to meet some ancestors that we won't have time to cover in depth:

Sociology & Anthropology: These new fields, developing around 1900, focused on the functional roles of religion and magic in social formation and maintenance. Writers such as Durkheim, Malinowski, and Weber explored ways that religion has provided social cohesion, while magic has traditionally served to bolster individual initiative. Anthropological studies attempted to place Western practices in a global perspective. Good survey: *Stolen Lightning: The Social Theory of Magic*, by Daniel O'Keefe.

Jane Ellen Harrison (British, 1850-1928): One of the founders of the academic study of Ancient Greek religion and mythology. Emphasized the experiential nature of religious and magical rites – ritual is a way we encounter things that cannot be put into language. Myths arise to explain or preserve rituals. Popularized the idea that all goddesses are aspects of a "triple goddess" – maiden, mother, and crone. She emphasized the value of Greek vase-painting for studying mythology, and wrote about ancient religious festivals and women's roles. Advocated for women's suffrage. One of the first British women to hold a career academic post. Book: *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*.

Sigmund Freud (Austrian, 1856-1939): Psychologist and social theorist. Emphasized notion of unconscious/subconscious actions and motivation. Emphasized dream interpretation and symbolic thinking, but used the term "magical thinking" mainly to describe childish delusions that our thoughts are affecting the outside world. Freud's

analysis of religion and magic is naturalistic – beliefs and practices evolved because they filled social and psychological functions. A skeptic, he titled one book on religion, *The Future of an Illusion*. Interestingly, he used names from Greek mythology for psychological phenomena such as the Oedipus and Electra complexes and Narcissism. Books: *Civilization & Its Discontents*, *Interpretation of Dreams*.

Carl Jung (Swiss, 1875-1961): Psychologist and spiritual explorer. Initially a student of Freud, Jung spun off in his own metaphysically-inflected direction. Jung emphasized the social nature of consciousness, seeing it structured around collective, unconscious “archetypes” – fundamental relations that humans encounter both internally and externally. Like Freud he focused on ways that magic helps people function in society. Jung delved into then-arcanic topics such as Eastern mysticism and Western alchemy – his book *Psychology & Alchemy* is provocative (and has lots of pictures!).

Aleister Crowley (British, 1875-1947): Ceremonial magician and all-round unpleasant character. Educated at Cambridge, he joined the Golden Dawn near its demise, which he helped hasten by demanding advanced initiations. Channeled multiple books that might have benefited from a bit of developmental editing. Developed idea of self-initiation as a magical journey (as opposed to a series of administered exams). Stated: “Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law.” Renowned for drug-sex-magic rites with various men and women, which Crowley claimed were exercises of will power. Various fingers both as a British intelligence agent and as a German sympathizer during the WWII era. Best work: *The Book of Thoth* and related Tarot deck.

AND THEN THE COLLAPSE

1914-1930

By 1910, the Golden Dawn had blossomed and wilted, dissolving into bickering and sordid accusations. Pamela Colman Smith and Arthur Waite had created their epoch-defining

Tarot deck – but its main influence would not be felt for decades. Eliphas Levi was dead, his work sinking into neglect.

And then it all came crashing down. World War I, 1914-1918, cleared many cultural decks. The waltz, immensely popular during the preceding decades, died abruptly, replaced by jazz and show tunes. Amid communist revolution, aristocracy lost its hold on the European imagination. And magic took a hard fall.

A new era of literary and cultural criticism, deconstruction, and existentialism rendered elaborate theories such as that of Eliphas Levi obsolete. After all, if you are skeptical about all texts and any possible “truth” behind them, what do you gain by correlating Hebrew letters and Tarot cards?

As groups like the Golden Dawn failed to train a cadre of serious students, inspired cranks like Aleister Crowley gobbled up attention, spewing forth one largely unintelligible volume after another. Ill-informed writers like Montague Summers flourished.

MARGARET MURRAY & THE MYTH OF PAGAN WITCHES

Worse for our case, in 1921 respected British Egyptologist Margaret Murray (1863-1963) famously claimed to have discovered substantial evidence that English witches were in fact underground feminist Pagans who celebrated a ritual wheel of the year and venerated the goddess Diana with joyous feasting and dancing (sound familiar?).

Much of Murray’s “evidence” involved old interrogation records obtained from victims who were asked leading questions while under coercion. By the 1970s her ideas were widely questioned by other students of the witch trials. Historian Keith Thomas called her theories “almost totally groundless.”

Yet before its demise, her theory that witches were secret Pagans inspired strangely varied offspring, including both Nazi ideologues and feminist Pagans.

What We Inherit: Following Murray, Neo-Paganism has propagated via teachings, songs, and writings the mistaken idea that witch-trial victims were secret Pagans. Writers



Every history of magic needs a picture of Aleister Crowley in full Golden Dawn regalia. Photo WikiCommons.

have also repeated inflated numbers of European witch-hunt victims, claiming millions – as if 50,000 was not horrible enough.

NAZIS & WITCHCRAFT

c. 1925-1945

Disturbingly, ideas similar to Murray's can be found among certain elements of the German Nazi movement.

Germany had a checkered relation to the occult, magic, and witchcraft. Beginning in the late 1700s, German researchers built a romanticized image of the "deutschen Volke," whose essence is preserved in folk tales, rural practices – and in the underground survival of a pre-Christian Pagan past.

Some high-ranking members of the Nazi Party, including Hess and Himmler, promoted what they saw as Pagan folk customs, helping foster a revival of supposedly authentic Germanic traditions. "German witches" were openly celebrated. This was part of a broader program of promoting "Aryan values."

The Nazis created a special "Hexen-sonderkommando" unit – not a military squad, but a research team that gathered evidence concerning the witch trials. The goal was to prove that the witch hunts aimed to exterminate the last vestiges of Germanic Paganism, persecuted for centuries by non-German (ie, Jewish-based) Christianity – thus giving a racist tinge to theories propounded earlier by Margaret Murray and others.

On the flip side, the Nazis outlawed and actively persecuted most occultist groups, just as they did most non-Nazi formations. Some high-ranking Nazis such as Goebbels ridiculed belief in the occult. Nazi interest in magic seems mostly concerned with promoting racist theories.

Footnote – after 1945, the witch-trial research lay dormant for several decades until the 1970s, when a German scholar discovered and analyzed the files – ultimately debunking Nazi theories while helping inspire the vast archival research of recent decades.

What We Inherit: No one suggests that Western feminists learned their Pagan history from Nazis. But the shared theory cautions us about the malleability of our magical and mythical ideas and how they can be twisted around

to serve selfish ends.

When we recognize Nazi interest in Paganism (and right-wing Paganolatry today), we are reminded that our traditions have complex roots, and that part of our magical and political work is to see clearly and begin to deconstruct these often-ignored aspects of our past.

The Unquiet Dead are those cultural ancestors who left behind a bitter and hurtful legacy – a legacy we are called to confront and heal in our magic and our activism.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

c. 1950

In the Sputnik Era that worshiped science and debunked "superstition," some magical trends continued beneath

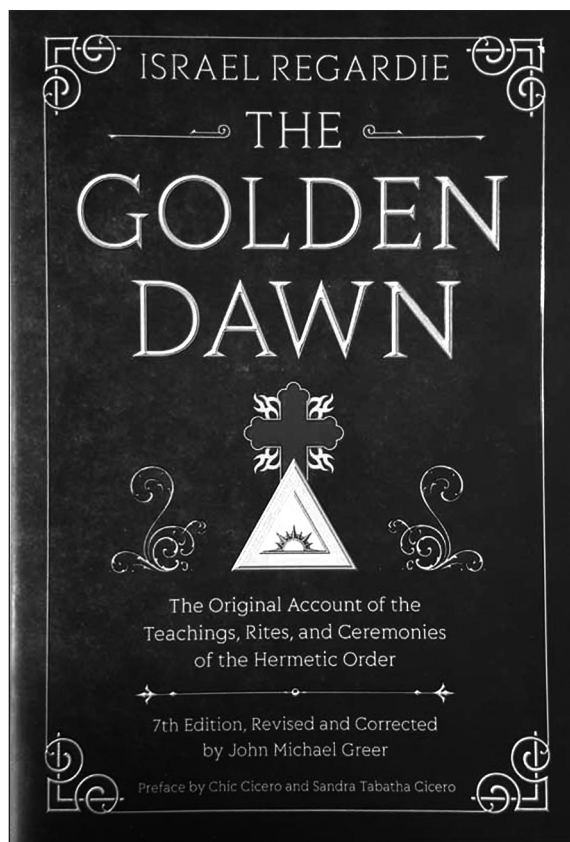
the surface. Writers such as Frazer and Jung inspired a new generation including Joseph Campbell and Hermann Hesse.

Israel Regardie, a former Golden Dawn initiate, published (1937-1940) the hitherto secret Golden Dawn rituals, giving outsiders (eg, all of us alive today) the first look inside this pivotal community.

The Smith-Waite Tarot deck, hardly a commercial sensation on its release, swam beneath the surface for decades before exploding in the 1960s.

Eastern practices and mystical teachers made some inroads in the West, both via writings and personal appearances and speaking tours. New age psychological trends blossomed, notably in California.

And Aleister Crowley's increasingly crackpot take on magic (exploiting a reputation as "the wickedest man in the world") at least had the effect of breaking through the barrier of silence surrounding mystical practices.



Israel Regardie did historians and magicians everywhere a big favor when he decided to reveal the original Golden Dawn rituals, into which he had been initiated. Perhaps there should be an expiration date on vows of secrecy?

PART VII: WICCA & PAGANISM TODAY

GERALD GARDNER, DOREEN VALIENTE & BRITISH TRADITIONAL WICCA

And now, after countless generations and numerous byways, we come to the direct grandparents of our contemporary tradition.

Gerald Gardner (1884–1964) was an English author whose 1954 book *Witchcraft Today* is often credited with bringing the Wiccan strand of Paganism to public attention.

Retiring at age 50 after a career in the foreign service, Gardner settled near the New Forest in the south of England and joined a local Rosicrucian Fellowship. According to his own colorful account, he soon met and was initiated into a secret coven of witches which carried an unbroken lineage back to ancient times.

Citing the coven as a pre-Christian survival that proved Margaret Murray's thesis about the unity of witchcraft and Paganism, Gardner

proceeded to "revive" and propagate this tradition, mixing in ideas from Freemasonry, ceremonial magic, folklore, and Aleister Crowley (whom he met around 1947). Gardner's claims regarding the details of this historical descent have been questioned by later scholars.

When British laws against espousing witchcraft (ie, laws against fraud and deceit) were loosened in the early 1950s, Gardner went public with the hugely influential book, *Witchcraft Today*. He founded a coven, entry into which was (and still is in this tradition) attained by initiation by a high priest or priestess who can claim lineage going back to Gardner and/or the New Forest.

Gardner's brand of Wicca honors both God and Goddess (often the Mother Goddess and the Horned God, identified by Doreen Valiente as Cernunnos). Gardner recruited

a string of high priestesses including Valiente, emphasizing the need for binary male and female energies.

Although built on a ceremonial base, the tradition emphasizes that each person must find their own truth and meaning in the rituals, an idea going back at least to the Eleusinian Mysteries.

The tradition teaches an ethical guideline, referred to as "The Wiccan Rede." In archaic language, it states, "An it harm none, do as thou wilt." The Gardnerian tradition is also credited with the Law of Return (aka the Rule of Three), which states that whatever energy a person puts

into the world – especially if it is magically charged – is likely to return on the sender threefold.

Gardner popularized the term "Wicca," Old English for "male witch," to describe his type of coven. He also used the term "Book of Shadows" to describe his personal magical journal.

Politically, Gardner worked

within the imperial bureaucracy and supported the British Conservative Party.

Gradually, Gardner's students began to form independent covens along the same lines, and a loose-knit "Gardnerian" tradition of Wicca spread throughout Britain and subsequently into Australia and North America in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Doreen Valiente (1922-1999) was a Wiccan writer and priestess who was responsible for many of the early rituals and liturgy of the Gardnerian Tradition. Initiated into Gardner's coven in 1953, she helped edit *Witchcraft Today* (Hutton credits her with removing much of the influence of Aleister Crowley).

Valiente brought to Wicca a strong Goddess orientation,



What lies veiled behind the curtain? Still from a youtube video about Gardnerian rituals.

and is credited with writing the most familiar version of The Charge of the Goddess, a poetic incantation that has served as one of modern Paganism's guiding documents.

During the 1970s, Valiente joined a far-right political group, the National Front, and may have seen her Pagan practices as connected. Given her other support for progressive causes, her motives are unclear, with some claiming she was an undercover spy for the British government.

British Traditional Wicca is a term used mainly outside Britain for the various Wiccan traditions that trace their lineage to the New Forest area. The most prominent of these traditions are Gardnerian Wicca and Alexandrian Wicca, but other traditions also claim a shared history.

What We Inherit: Reclaiming and other Neo-Pagan and Wiccan-oriented groups owe an immeasurable debt to Gardner and Valiente. From the broad identification of witchcraft and Paganism, to details such as The Rede and the Charge of the Goddess, our tradition and magical culture are infused with their influences.

Most important is the emphasis on each person finding their own truth, which sits well with new age and anarchist tendencies.

Even where we markedly differ, such as our evolution away from gender binaries, such changes are often discussed in light of Gardnerian practices.

MARIJA GIMBUTAS

Archaeologist Marija Gimbutas (Lithuania 1921 to U.S. 1994) began her career in mid-century, gradually unearthing and studying hundreds of artifacts which she interpreted as evidence of stone-age, goddess-centric cultures that predated the warrior cultures of early written history.

The Civilization of the Goddess (1991) presented an overview of her conclusions about Neolithic (Late Stone Age, c. 5000 BCE) cultures across Europe, studying housing patterns, social structure, art, and religion. Gimbutas explicated what she saw as the differences between the Old European system, which she considered goddess- and woman-centered, and the Bronze Age Indo-European patriarchal culture which supplanted it.

Throughout the area of Neolithic Europe that she studied, Gimbutas found carved images of females that she interpreted as goddesses of birth, death, and regeneration. She concluded that women were particularly honored by Neolithic European people and that the primary deities were female.

According to her views, the Old European matrilineal societies were peaceful, honored women, and espoused economic equality. Building on her extensive art-historical research, Gimbutas stressed her conclusion that the art

of Old Europe reflected a mythopoetic perception of the sacredness and mystery of the natural world, and that behind the various artistic and mythic manifestations of the ancient Goddess lies an essential unity: all cultures honored the Earth and divinity as feminine.

Other archaeologists have challenged Gimbutas's broad theories. One called her "immensely knowledgeable but not very good in critical analysis." Others questioned her interpretation of figurines as "goddesses," and her projection of religious beliefs onto pre-literate cultures.

What We Inherit: Gimbutas has exercised a huge if mostly unacknowledged impact on feminist Paganism, providing us with a plausible historical narrative of a time before patriarchy.

Her interpretation of even quite abstract ancient carved figures as female is convincing, providing a basis for her more daring leaps of imagination. While her ideas about a pre-historic Goddess cult remain controversial, authors such as Riane Eisler have built on her work, and their views of a peaceful, goddess-oriented culture inspire our own visions today.

In our minds, we are "reclaiming" this ancient Goddess heritage. If it turns out never to have existed, still we remain inspired by the vision – the myth – that such a society is possible.

CULTURALLY APPROPRIATED PRACTICES

Before we wrap up with a look at our most recent influences, let's take a look at a tangled topic – traditions from which modern Wiccan movements have deliberately or unknowingly appropriated beliefs and practices.

At the end of the essay, I'll take a look at our general tendency to appropriate. Here, we'll focus on two examples:

- Afro-Caribbean
- Native American

AFRO-CARIBBEAN (The Orisha)

In areas of North America where numbers of people have immigrated from the Caribbean (eg, New York, LA, Bay Area, Florida), there are local communities practicing Santería, Candomblé, and other traditions that work with the Orisha, a group of West African deities (also known as Yoruban deities).

In these areas, we are blessed to be able to participate (by invitation or sincere request) in ceremonies involving the Orisha. These practices are incredibly complex compared to Reclaiming, with specific rituals and songs for each deity as well as ways of approaching any of the group. Since

the ceremonies often involve honoring and communing with ancestors, they appeal to those of us grounded in Halloween/Samhain-based magic.

Some people trained in working with the Orisha have helped lead and teach at Reclaiming camps and rituals. The results have been alternately beautiful and jarring, leading some organizers to wonder whether we are ready to weave Afro-Caribbean and Euro-based traditions in open settings.

In particular, two issues have arisen:

- well-meaning people with limited training invoke one of the Orisha in an otherwise non-Yoruban ritual. This does not respect traditional practices.
- even if the invokers are well-trained, most people at the ritual are not. We do not know the songs and chants, we don't know how to gracefully flow with the energy. Is this really a way of honoring a deity?

The place to learn about and work with the Orisha is with initiated teachers.

Migene González-Wippler has written a good short introduction to the Orisha and the complexities of their traditions.

NATIVE AMERICAN PRACTICES

Modern Pagans have also borrowed various ways of doing ritual from our perception of Native American practices.

Actually, there is no such thing as generic "Native American practices." Rather, there are hundreds of tribes and bands, each with their own ways and beliefs.

Every locality and bioregion had, and many continue to have, their own tribes and networks. Names can be learned and respectfully spoken in our rituals. Support can be given to present-day organizing by members of local tribes and bands.

Most of us in anglo-settled North America hold our events, rituals, and generally live on land appropriated from Indigenous Peoples. Although decimated by colonialism, descendents of many of these Peoples and tribes are still alive. Some still practice traditional ceremonies. This is especially true in Canada, but also many areas of the U.S.

An example of appropriation – Folks involved in direct action organizing have for several decades made connections with local Native American groups. At Nevada Test Site in the later 1980s, members of the Western Shoshone nation (whose land north of Las Vegas was appropriated for the nuclear test area) took part in huge protests, offering ceremonies throughout week-long encampments as well as leading processions to the gates of the site, where

activists did civil disobedience (with over 4000 arrests around 1988-89).

Hundreds of mainly white protesters thus got to be part of Shoshone ceremonies. These (sometimes quite long) ceremonies were not especially participatory – we were guests, not students.

Nevertheless, from this and other similar engagements, non-Indigenous folks have learned practices such as sage-smudging, using animal bones as magical tools, or consumption of ceremonial substances. Smudging (we often call it "aura-cleansing") by wafting sage-smoke with a feather became almost ubiquitous in Wiccan rituals and Paganish gatherings around 1990.

Some might say, "Similar practices were probably found among our more distant ancestors, too. Native practices are awakening us to our own past." If that resonates for you in your personal practice, fine.

For public Reclaiming rituals, we seem to be moving away from this. There are so many potential practices – why choose ones that seem tinged with appropriation?

What about the elements, honored in many Native American traditions? Euro-heritage and other Western folks can point to our own somewhat continuous traditions from ancient Greece and Rome through Medieval Christianity and on to the (British-based) Pagan revival.

Still, if you live in North America, consider – when you first heard that each direction was connected to a natural element, what was your cultural association? I think mine was Native practices.

We're probably not going to quit invoking the directional elements. But we can be aware, and not "cherry-pick" other pieces of Indigenous practices to ornament our rituals. As with the Orisha, the place to practice these ways is at Native ceremonies. Open gatherings (sometimes called pow-wows) are held in many parts of the country.

A note on terminology: Times and language change. The simple word "Indian" was mostly out-dated by 1970, replaced by "American Indian" and "Native American." In more recent times, the terms "Indigenous" and "First People" have been used.

For more on cultural appropriation, see our Teen Earth Magic Workbook – teeneearthmagic.org/workbook

CULTURAL AND POLITICAL INFLUENCES

In tracing the antecedents of Reclaiming, the magical history is only half of the story.

Many of our most beloved ancestors are political and cultural activists – folks who have inspired our vision that ordinary people can join together and change the world!

Weaving all of these influences into the present essay proved impossible in the two-dimensional space of print media.

So we refer you to the Activism chapter for a short survey of broader cultural and political threads such as feminism, the civil rights movement, and peace/anti-nuke organizing that helped midwife our tradition.

There's even a section on the Hippies!

FROM 1970 TO TODAY

Here's a quick look at a few trends and names that carried magic, Wicca, and Paganism from Gardner to the present.

Other Traditions – the Alexandrian tradition, NROOGD

(The New Reformed Order of the Golden Dawn), Modern Druids, and many others developed language and practices through the 1960s and 70s. Networks such as Covenant of the Goddess helped create links and common cultures among varied traditions.

Metaphysical Shops & Festivals –

metaphysical shops as well as festivals such as the Michigan Women's Music Festival, Merry Meet, Rites of Spring, and PantheaCon have provided a hub for people to meet and network.

Alternative Spirituality – the 1970s saw a wave of non-traditional spiritual movements, some adapting Eastern practices such as meditation, some advocating for sexual and emotional liberation, and some just thinly-disguised ego-tripping. Reclaiming inherits from this milieu both practices and self-critiques.

Luisah Teish – Teish, born in New Orleans, was involved in early multi-cultural rituals involving Reclaiming, and infused myth, story, and movement into Bay Area traditions.

Z Budapest – Z Budapest's feminist-inspired rituals helped create a context for Reclaiming's brand of activist eco-feminism. Her women-only tradition has (at least as of 2019) excluded trans women, leading to controversies at Pagan events. Her song "We All Come from the Goddess" is a Pagan classic.

Feri – the Feri tradition of Victor and Cora Anderson, a blend of Celtic and Indigenous Hawaiian (Huna) practices, served as a training ground for some of Reclaiming's early teachers. The Feri tools of the Iron and Pearl Pentacles are still widely used in Reclaiming, as well as their later offspring such as the Pentacle of the Great Turning, a magical working built on Joanna Macy's teachings. Feri teachings about Three Selves – Talking, Younger, and Deep Self – illuminate different facets of our being.

Postmodern Influences

– Reclaiming inherits from the broader cultural milieu a range of "postmodern" critiques including feminism, queer studies, decolonization projects, and a general post-binary, de-centering outlook on mainstream culture.

RECLAIMING'S FOUNDERS

We'll need a separate book to trace in detail the various paths and influences that Reclaiming's founders and fellow



Contemporary Druids gather at Stonehenge. Photo by Sandy Raidy/WikiCommons.

travelers followed en route to 1980.

These books will be foundational:

- Starhawk's *The Spiral Dance* (1979, updated 1999) is the founding text for Reclaiming and many other circles.
- Starhawk's *Dreaming the Dark* (1982) places early Reclaiming magic in its activist milieu.
- Margot Adler's *Drawing Down the Moon*. Journalist and NPR commentator Adler's book (1979, revised 2006) was the first comprehensive survey of Wiccan and Neo-Pagan movements. A clear, balanced look at our traditions.
- Ronald Hutton's *The Triumph of the Moon* (2001) traces Wicca and Paganism from about 1800 to the present. Ex-

tensive coverage of 1950-80 traditions and their founders offers a rich and complex picture of our backstory.

- Jone Salomonsen's *Enchanted Feminism* (2001), based on interviews and personal experience, is a PhD study of the early philosophies and practices of San Francisco Reclaiming.
- John Sulak and V. Vale's *Re/Search* anthology *Modern Pagan* (2001) features interviews with some of Reclaiming's founding generation as well as folks from other traditions.
- Luke Hauser's *Direct Action* (2003) is a novelized account of the activist milieu in which Reclaiming was born. The final scene portrays the 1984 Spiral Dance.
- *Reclaiming Newsletter* (1980-1996) and *Reclaiming Quarterly* (1997-2011), featuring hundreds of articles by Reclaiming folks, can be found on our websites – visit WeaveAndSin.org/back-issues.

WHAT'S NEXT?

An ever-evolving tradition, Reclaiming continues to absorb new influences. While remaining at core a feminist-inspired, ecstatic/celebratory tradition where each person is their own spiritual authority, change is part of our essence.

In the lyrics of one of our oldest chants:

"She changes everything She touches, and everything She touches, changes!"

Youth-oriented camps such as Teen Earth Magic, Witchlets, and Redwood Magic as well as all-ages witchcamps such as Vermont and Tejas Web aren't just "passing along" our tradition – they are cauldrons in which the insights and visions of new generations begin to reshape what Reclaiming is and will be.

Gender relations have always been front-and-center around Reclaiming, and recent developments have included statements of support for trans folks in our communities. (See interviews about gender in the *Teen Earth Magic Workbook* – see front of this file.)

Free Cascadia WitchCamp (held for about a decade till 2015) explored relations to the land and a communal economic model ("pay what you can"). FCWC and other WitchCamps have worked with gender and racial diversity and inclusivity issues.

Camps and communities have taken root in Europe and Australia, and recently a new community has been forming in Brazil. Via spotify and youtube, our chants are being heard around much of the planet. Each region brings

its own practices and cultural challenges to the mix and inspires others to learn and adapt.

And so the journey continues. Today's spells create tomorrow's magic.

Will our network always be known as "Reclaiming?" Perhaps.

Will our experiences color what comes after us? Certainly.

So mote it become!



The Bay Area's Spiral Dance ritual raises magical power for peace, justice, and healing for the Earth and all living beings. People also have a pretty good time! Photo Michael Rauner.

Many Thanks for Feedback!

Although the present author is finally responsible for all errors, omissions, etc, the following gave valuable feedback on early drafts – many thanks!

You may hold each of these people personally accountable for any misplaced serial commas.

- Michael Bailey / Iowa State University
- Ronald Hutton / University of Bristol
- Rashunda Trumble
- Maevyn
- Jacin Glitterdirt
- Ingrid Pollyak
- Gary Jaron
- Janell Mort
- George Franklin
- M. Macha NightMare

Afterword

What Does It Mean to Appropriate Influences?

As our traditions grow more complex and weave people from diverse backgrounds, issues of lineages and appropriation arise. Discussions around our communities led to inclusion here of sections on culturally-appropriated traditions such as Native American or Orisha-based practices.

Among the feedback I received on this essay was a thoughtful meta-note from Rashunda, who said that although she appreciated that I included these sections, I said nothing about our inheritance of the general propensity to appropriate.

For better and worse, cultures borrow from one another. That part isn't new.

What seems unique in our era of Euro-American dominance is the tendency to "capitalize" culture, including non-European traditions. Music, art, and spiritual practices are not simply adopted – they are commodified and exchanged (for cash, for prestige, for cultural advantage, etc) with little regard for their original creators or contexts.

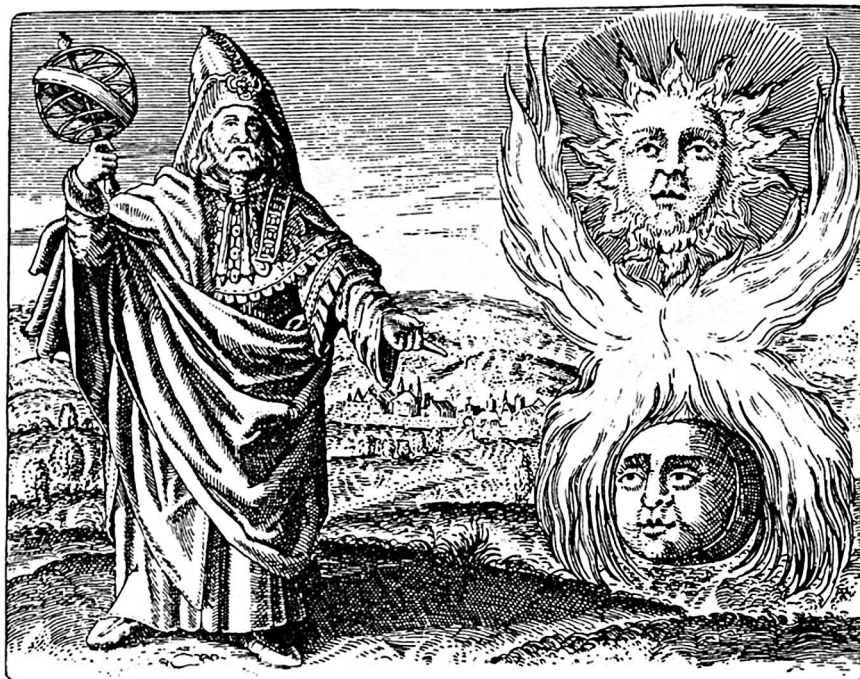
Further, they are exchanged with the goal of gaining more resources so that we can commodify more culture. It's a never-ending, always-expanding cycle of appropriation of other people's creations. In short – capitalism.

We are heirs to that tradition. We absorb influences with the aim of expanding our horizons so we can absorb more influences. We aren't always careful about the origins of those influences, their previous contexts, or the impact on other cultures.

Neo-Paganism, and Reclaiming in particular, has crafted an eclectic grab-bag of spiritual influences. Through the years, many beautiful dances have occurred. And along the way, many toes have been stepped on.

May this essay contribute toward increased awareness of our inheritances, and a bit less toe-stomping.

– Luke Hauser, Parahistorian



*A Renaissance Hermeticist learns to command the Sun and Moon – a valuable skill! From D. Stolcius von Stolcenbeerg, *Viridarium chymicum*, 1624. Courtesy Wikimedia Commons.*

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visit our website for links and more resources – WeaveAndSpin.org/dance

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RECLAIMING'S HISTORY

See the list toward the end of the article, and visit WeaveAndSpin.org/spiral-dance-features

ONLINE ARTICLES FROM RQ

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- Witchcraft & Magic in Europe (review and suggested reading list for Ankarloo & Clark essay series)
- When the Drummers Were Women
- Ritual Art of the Ancient Celts
- Mithras & the End of Time
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ORIGINAL SOURCES

Visit our website for links to many original sources – WeaveAndSpin.org/dance



OUR ACTIVIST ANCESTORS

by Luke Hauser

Reclaiming Quarterly's forthcoming book on magic, activism, and ritual will feature two history essays.

The longer piece on Magical Ancestors can be found in the earlier pages of this file, and at:

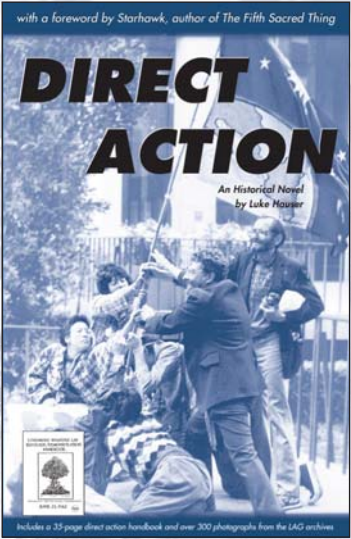
WeaveAndSpin.org/history-ancestors

A major part of Reclaiming's backstory is found not in ritual circles or magic classes but in the streets.

This short essay surveys some of our activist forebears – movements which have inspired our ways of doing activism

Feedback – feedback and suggestions are welcome till around the end of 2020. Contact:

ReclaimingQuarterly@gmail.com



Luke Hauser's historical novel tells the back-story of Reclaiming, placing the Pagan Cluster amidst California's vibrant activist scene.

Free download of PDF version – DirectAction.org

"Dramatically brings to life the experience of nonviolent direct action – a new generation of activists will learn from it."

– Daniel Ellsberg, author of *The Pentagon Papers*



OUR ACTIVIST ANCESTORS

by Luke Hauser

A major part of Reclaiming's backstory is found not in ritual circles or magic classes but in the streets.

Reclaiming and our co-conspirators are heirs to a long tradition of nonviolent resistance. Here's one person's sense of some movements which have inspired our style of magical activism.

This article mainly covers Europe and North America. Sections on Gandhi and on cultural resistance broaden the perspective.

For our magical background and a general introduction, see WeaveSndfSpin.org/history-ancestors/.

DIGGERS & LEVELLERS ENGLAND 1649

Although the term "Diggers" was used loosely as an insult toward any squatters or political dissidents, a famous group calling itself True Levellers but known to history as *the Diggers* assembled during the English Civil War to occupy untended land outside of London.

Inspired by pamphleteer Gerard Winstanley, the group occupied several sites during Spring 1649 before being violently dispersed, not by Puritan authorities (who visited the site but left the Diggers undisturbed), but by thugs hired by local property owners.

The similarity to Food Not Bombs, Homes Not Jails, and other grassroots groups of recent decades is striking – reclaiming underused resources and redistributing them to those in need, even at the risk of state repression. This is a model for direct action organizing – you provide a social service, and if the police interfere, it highlights the injustice of the system.

We also see the Dig-

gers' legacy in fights against privatization of community resources such as schools, medicine, and housing – we advocate for the common good instead of private profit.

Levellers – another pejorative term thrown at political progressives of the mid-1600s who demanded decent conditions for working people, an end to the enclosure of common land, religious tolerance, and increased political participation. Drawing their base from among independent producers and craftspeople, most so-called Levellers didn't favor collectivism or communism.

In the Civil War era when censorship collapsed, the Levellers (and Diggers and religious radicals) flooded Britain with home-produced pamphlets – an inspiration to self-publishers everywhere!

Loosely-affiliated organizers in the Parliamentary Army and radical congregations pioneered the mass petition, notably the manifesto *The Agreement of the People*. While not a party in the modern sense, these agitators had tremendous influence in the army and radical circles, and their ideas were a force in English politics until the Cromwellian reaction of 1650.

Their broad program of justice and participation has remained an inspiration to grassroots activists ever since.

The Diggers and Levellers rose during the English Civil War era of the 1640s, which was a period of incredible political, religious, and social upheaval. Among other groups (often named by adversaries) were Seekers, Manifestarians, Quakers, Ranters, and Muggletonians.

Christopher Hill's book, *The World Turned Upside Down*, is a colorful and inspiring look at radical groups of the era. There is also a short article about the Diggers on our website – see endnotes.

QUAKERS, UNITARIANS, & CONGREGATIONALISTS 1700S TO PRESENT

A survey of radical Protestant groups – let alone Jewish, Buddhist, Humanist, and other groups – would take an encyclopedia. Let's take a quick look at a few movements that have directly influenced Reclaiming and modern Paganism.



Declaration and Standard of the Levellers of England – a pamphlet from the revolutionary era of the 1640s. Image courtesy Wikimedia Commons.





The Puritan legacy – although today they are seen as progressive voices, several large mainstream Protestant denominations have their roots in Puritanism. In addition to moral constriction, their legacy of individual pursuit of salvation has fed a societal hostility to collective solutions.

Quakers – Born amid the turmoil of the English Civil War (see above), the Society of Friends survived the post-1650 reaction by avowing political quietism and pacifism. The pejorative name “Quakers” stuck.

Some emigrated across the Atlantic, settling in the colony of Pennsylvania. Quakers have long been active in social issues such as the abolition of slavery and opposition to war and militarism.

During the period of WWI (1914-18), Friends Service Committees were organized in England and the US to assist members in resisting military conscription.

Since that time, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) has been involved in many progressive issues.

AFSC members took part in Civil Rights activism, and passed along techniques and philosophy of nonviolent resistance to the anti-nuclear movement that spawned Reclaiming (see below). The Nonviolence Guidelines used since that time came to Reclaiming via AFSC trainers (see Nonviolence essays in Activism section, forthcoming – and visit DirectAction.org).

Unitarians – Originating in Eastern Europe in the Reformation period, Unitarian beliefs found fertile ground in England during the Civil War period (see Diggers above). Organized congregations had formed by the later 1700s.

Among the various groups adopting the name Unitarian, the common thread is a belief that God is One, as opposed to mainstream Christianity’s trinity. The groups have tended to be politically and socially progressive, dating back to their English radical roots.

Unitarians are organized as independent congregations, and form part of a broad Protestant movement known as congregationalism – see below.

In the religious ferment of the early 1800s, some Unitarian congregations merged as the Unitarian Universalist Association. UU fellowships are active across North America, and support many progressive and community causes.

Some UU groups have a Pagan Interest Circle known as the Covenant of UU Pagans, or CUUPS. How do Unitarians address polytheism? “One Goddess, many names!”

Congregationalists – A loose term for a type of religious organizing that includes Unitarians, Quakers, Baptists, and other independent groups. Each local congregation

handles its own affairs, hires its own clergy, pays its own bills, etc. In particular, there are no bishops or other hierarchical church officials above the congregation.

When the dust settled after the American religious ferment of the early 1800s, some Protestant groups formed a sect known as Congregationalists, which later merged into the United Church of Christ. The UCC still uses a congregationalist structure,

and is among the more progressive of Protestant denominations.

Reclaiming communities and camps are “congregationalist” in the sense that each operates independently and makes its own decisions. Reclaiming has a network of trained teachers, but local groups are free to choose among those teachers, and also to add others of their own choosing. (The formal requirement is that Witch-Camps or classes taught in Reclaiming’s name have at least one Reclaiming-trained teacher. Contact us for info.)



Quakers? Seekers? Ranters? Reclaiming spiral dancers in funny clothes? Mid-1600s satirical illustration. Courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

JEWISH INFLUENCES

See also the essay on Magical History for more Jewish influences on Reclaiming and Neo-Paganism.

Jewish traditions of biblical commentary – where there are no recognized authorities, but volumes of debate over interpretation – have contributed to our ever-evolving culture of radical strategizing and organizing.

Also pertinent is the American Jewish development of independent congregations. The Rabbinic tradition – a direct and indirect influence on many of us – emphasizes holding power accountable and a hope for a better tomorrow.

Change is possible!



SUFFRAGISTS 1800S-1920

The suffragists are notable as an early feminist movement with at least some factions dedicated to nonviolent direct action. Arising in the mid-1800s, the campaign for women's right to vote took until after WWI to succeed in most countries, and even then was often limited by property qualifications.

The movement also advocated for wider women's social rights and participation.

Various factions favored lobbying, nonviolent activism, and property destruction. As usual, the "violent" actions that damaged property garnered most media attention, and were denounced as "terrorism."

Nonviolent actions involved women chaining themselves to railings in public buildings, refusing to pay taxes or fines, and going on hunger strikes, as well as mass marches and demonstrations.

As the movement evolved, fissures developed along class and race lines – would the women's movement challenge white privilege and elite dominance of politics, or did it simply seek to open more opportunities to already-advantaged people?

Still, throughout a century of organizing, the suffragist movement was a rare example of women's political leadership, and prepared women for participation in governments as well as social leadership positions.

ANARCHISM LATE 1800S

The original people to use the term "anarchist" are not exactly our most prized ancestors. Let's give them props for coming up with a great name, and for the idea that we don't need leaders to tell us what to do.

Unfortunately, in its early days, anarchism seems often to have attracted unstable people who threw bombs or attempted to assassinate political leaders. In more than one case (notably the Haymarket debacle in 1886, which discredited a labor action and led to executions of innocent

organizers), a vibrant mass movement was derailed by the violent actions of a few.

By the 1900s, the use of "anarchist" violence was being critiqued by Lenin and others as a failure of faith – to resort to private acts of violence betrays lack of confidence in a mass movement and the inevitability of socialist victory.

Our main takeaway from the early history of Anarchism is the vision of a leaderless, truly democratic movement in which each person fully develops their own gifts and powers, coupled with a commitment to nonviolent direct action.

This loosely anarchist approach is sometimes called "feminist process."



International Workers of the World, or Wobblies – anarchist-influenced labor radicals whose heyday was around 1900. The Wobbly vision of one great union of all workers endures!

LABOR ORGANIZING C. 1900

Labor movements have long been a backbone of popular resistance. Peasant uprisings, enclosure protests, Luddite and other incipient anti-capitalist movements, and finally socialist-inspired labor unions have helped to focus working people's passions.

Activists are heirs to working people's pride, insisting that work is good and fulfilling, not something to be shunned and scorned – hence the amount of volunteer work we do!

A gift of older labor movements is the idea of solidarity – of sticking together through thick and thin (mainly thin). When a union strikes,

everyone goes out. Those who refuse are pressured to comply. Facing massive corporations and their government agents, workers and their communities gained strength in unity.

Other political movements have adopted the idea of solidarity, with varying success.

Essentially, solidarity works best when it is imposed by the situation – everyone works at the same factory, or everyone has the same minority skin color. As someone said: "When you're stuck together, you stick together."

Direct action movements have adopted solidarity as a resistance tactic, particularly when in jail. Protesters demand equal treatment, decent conditions, and that no one be singled out as a leader (note the connection with anarchism).

This "jail solidarity" works to a degree – basically, it works as long as we are "stuck together." Once we are offered release, solidarity becomes voluntary, and is much more difficult to maintain.

Ultimately, we inherit from our working ancestors a strong





sense of the dignity of human labor, and a sense that our lives will go better if we stick together!

MARX, LENIN, & SOCIALISM EARLY 1900S

How can we not mention Marx, Lenin, & Company?

Yet speak their names and the witch hunters spring into action. The 1950s McCarthyist hysteria was aimed at all socialists – but particularly Soviet-style Marxism-Leninism. Even today their names are met with ignorance and fear.

Karl Marx was a sharp thinker (as well as a cranky co-organizer). His attempts to establish working people's organizations ended in hair-splitting schism and bitter denunciations of deviationism.

He bequeathed to us an optimistic sense that those striving to create a world of peace and justice are moving with the inexorable tide of history. Marx's Hegel-inspired, developmental view of history suggests that within the capitalist socio-economic system are sown the seeds (ie, the new organizing structures) of its transcendence by socialism. Victory is inevitable if we persevere!

Marx's writing continues to inspire critical thinkers. Volume I of *Das Kapital* remains a solid introduction to economic analysis, and his political essays are short, pithy critiques of contemporary events. His theory of historical materialism is foundational in fields from radical economics to history to cultural studies.

Vladimir Lenin was a principle organizer of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. He had some good ideas, such as the need for a broad network of communications and a disciplined party capable of making decisions and carrying them out (amazing idea, huh?). His excellent essay *State & Revolution* articulates the need for new forms of social power, as opposed to simply capturing old offices – hence the need for revolution, not reform.

He also helped pave the way for Stalin's dictatorship by insisting on the unquestioned power of Bolshevik

party leadership. In Lenin's eyes, only the leadership of a disciplined communist party could correctly assess the revolutionary situation and offer clear direction to the working masses. Under Stalin, this became virtually one-person rule.

Lenin's legacy to us is largely negative – North American anarchism of the post-60s era grew up in response to the Leninist-inspired, male-hierarchical radicalism of the 60s.

Sadly we seem to have tossed out Marx's economic critiques and Lenin's sense of disciplined commitment at the same time.

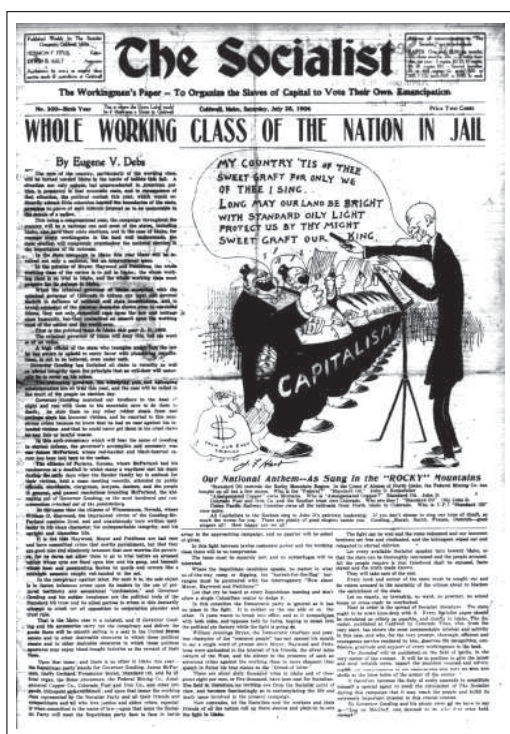
Rosa Luxemburg – German socialist organizer whose approach was more grassroots than Lenin's. While still an ardent socialist, she believed that revolutionary uprisings

had to originate with popular agitation, and the role of the party was to shape and channel this energy. Lenin accused her of expecting "spontaneous" revolution, compared to his own vision that the communist party would interpret and announce the time and place. Luxemburg's legacy continues to inspire fresh visions of Marxism.

Leon Trotsky – a late-comer to Lenin's hardline Bolshevism, Trotsky tended more toward the theories of popular initiative favored by Rosa Luxemburg. This set him at odds with Stalin, who eventually had Trotsky assassinated. Trotsky spelled out a theory of "dual power," whereby revolutionary movements build autonomous institutions and bases of power that gradually supplant the old bourgeois institutions, until in a revolutionary moment the old powers are simply swept aside. Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* is inspiring and provocative.

Antonio Gramsci – Italian communist imprisoned by Mussolini, from where he wrote his influential *Notebooks*. Developed idea of "hegemony," of build-

ing alternative political, cultural, social, and economic power prior to and parallel with direct confrontations with authority. Post-1960s ideas of cultural revolution owe something to Gramsci, as do analyses which move beyond crude economic determinism to acknowledge the key roles of ideology and social power. Gramsci's multi-polar approach to power has helped open leftist strategizing to movements such as feminism (talking about the role of reproduction), black power (who is and is not part of a community or social group), etc.



The Seattle Socialist, July 1906 – one of thousands of radical 'zines of the Progressive Era. Image courtesy UW Labor Press Project.



WALDORF & CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Waldorf education, based in the teachings of Rudolph Steiner, aims to develop people's artistic, intellectual, and practical skills in a holistic manner. Learning by experience and cultivation of creativity are key aspects of Waldorf education. Standardized testing is usually limited to that required by the state.

Steiner believed that all people have a spiritual core and simply need support in finding it. In some Waldorf settings, students may participate in a variety of spiritual practices, with none being prioritized.

Steiner has been criticized for propagating white supremacist attitudes that were common in his day (and perhaps have never abated?), and the Waldorf movement struggles with this legacy.

Waldorf and other educational alternatives influence our sense that each person brings unique gifts, that no one is "the expert," and that all of us can learn from one another.

WitchCamps also eschew standardized magical testing except as required by the state.

GANDHI & NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE MID-1900S

Mohandas Gandhi (1869-1948) was a major organizer for Indian independence and a pioneer in the use of mass nonviolent direct action.

Basing his strategy in religious and philosophical commitments, Gandhi emphasized the notion of Satya, often translated as "Truth." Each person/spirit carries part of the Truth, but no one carries all of it. Only by nonviolent dialog can we achieve a complete sense of Truth. On the other hand, debates and arguments among people actually reflect internal disputes within each human being. To aim violence at another person is thus to attack part of oneself.

For Gandhi, the quest for Satya was active, and did not hesitate to confront authority. Civil disobedience actions were known as Satyagraha, or "truth-obstinacy."

As part of the independence movement of the early 1900s, Gandhi helped organize civil disobedience campaigns, including a 240-mile March to the Sea in protest of the British (colonial overlords of India since the 1700s) monopoly on salt. Tax on government-supplied salt was a major source of colonial revenue.

Beginning with about 80 people, the march grew to tens of thousands. Thousands were arrested and/or attacked by police. Gandhi was jailed until early 1931.

Indian independence was achieved in 1947. The following year, Gandhi was assassinated.

Gandhi's ideas influenced such later activists as Martin Luther King, Jr in the US and Steve Biko in South Africa. Both were also assassinated for their efforts, yet like Gandhi's their campaigns ultimately succeeded.

Gandhi's notion of Satyagraha is taught in the US nonviolence movement, but his influence has been felt mainly indirectly, through the Civil Rights movement.

CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT 1950S & 1960S

No political current in the U.S. influenced the nonviolent action movement more than the Civil Rights struggle. Sparked by social mobility and dislocations of the WWII era, protests against racial bias began to spread across the South in the early 1950s.

Rosa Parks' dramatic refusal to give up a whites-only bus seat in 1955 launched a boycott that eventually integrated the Montgomery AL buses. The bus actions were followed by a decade of sit-ins, marches, and civil disobedience aimed at ending Jim Crow segregation laws and practices.

Churches – independent congregations headed by local ministers and staff – formed the organizing backbone and anchored the longterm resilience of this movement.

Thousands of people took part in actions organized and led by People of Color. Skillful use of media and especially the new medium of television carried dramatic images of nonviolent direct action to a huge audience.

The success of specific campaigns varied, often depending on the vagaries of court decisions. Many direct actions were not successful in their immediate goals.

But over the course of a decade the persistent organizing and educational campaigns cumulatively led to the national 1964 Civil Rights Act – the most sweeping overhaul of race-related law since the Reconstruction era. Groups and networks forged during this struggle have carried on the organizing in subsequent decades.

The Civil Rights movement, with a strong emphasis on active nonviolence, pioneered tactics still used today – a group of people peaceably block access to (or occupy) an objectionable business or office and risk arrest or police violence when they refuse to obey commands to move.

Activism trainings, Summer Mobilizations, conferences, and other gatherings passed skills and tactics from the 1950s through to the present day. Movements such as the anti-nuclear protests of the 1980s, the anti-globalization convergences of the early 2000s, and the recent wave of Black Lives Matter activism have adapted these lessons and carried them into new issues and projects.





ANTI-WAR & NEW LEFT 1960S

The movement to end the Vietnam War revitalized the activism of post-WII generations, bringing skills and strategies from the Civil Rights and Labor Movements to a broader swath of society.

Organized protests began on college campuses around 1964 and quickly escalated parallel to U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War.

Direct action tactics such as sit-ins and civil disobedience were adapted from the Civil Rights Movement, along with a strident tone reminiscent of 1930s labor strife.

Mass rallies, marches, and demonstrations brought countless (mostly young) people into the streets. 1967 saw the formation of the National Mobilization Committee which organized several large-scale protests.

Teach-ins and underground newspapers wove anti-war activism with broader issues including imperialism, racism, and classism.

While popular music and 60s culture were also influences, the anti-war movement was distinct from the hippies, with their focus on personal freedom, psychic explorations, and “going with the flow” (see below). Later legend has conflated the two tendencies.

New Left – economic and class critiques typified the 1960s New Left, a Marxist-infused tendency that broke with old-school communism and began to integrate social and cultural issues into Marxism. Antonio Gramsci and Rosa Luxemburg were influences (see above). The New Left (and much of the anti-war movement) were in turn critiqued for their cis-male dominated, hierarchical structures.

Debate has long raged over the role these movements played in (A) ending the war and (B) changing society for the better. The war did end (unlike some recent wars), and without a doubt the protests changed participants’ lives.

The upsurge of direct activism, coupled with feminist and gay critiques of the 1960s movements, infused the late 1970s milieu that gave birth to Reclaiming.

FEMINISM 1950S TO 1970S

Feminism developed gradually out of the women’s suffrage and temperance (anti-alcohol) movements. Some writers have identified “waves” of feminism, with the first wave overlapping the suffrage movement. This period

focused on legal issues such as property and business ownership, and especially the right to vote.

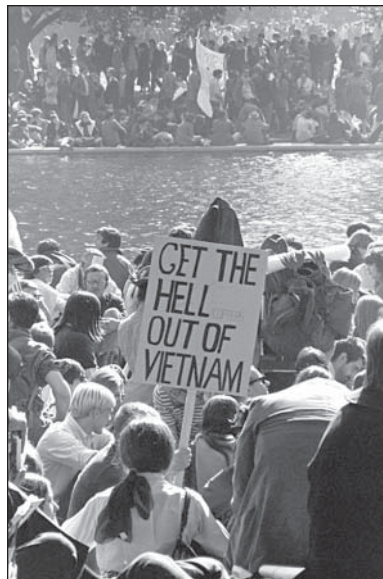
This first wave is sometimes seen as culminating in the writing of Simone de Beauvoir, whose book *The Second Sex* examined women’s role as “Other” in a male-dominated society. Her existential analysis inspired later thought about the experiences of People of Color, GLBTQ people, and other oppressed groups.

Second-wave feminism, sometimes called “women’s liberation,” describes the period from roughly 1960 to 1980, when movements gained strength first in the US and eventually throughout much of the world. The general aim has been social and personal equality, not just political rights. This has included a focus on reproductive rights, domestic violence and rape, and building women’s economic alternatives.

This second wave especially influenced Reclaiming and other feminist Pagan formations, which have been critical not only of the subordination of women in traditional Christianity, Judaism, and other religions, but also of men’s domination of many activist and Pagan groups.

Through this period, “Dianic” covens, circles, and groups formed and reformed, creating women-only spaces for spiritual exploration as well as social-political activism. Some of these groups continue to this day.

A major organizing vehicle for the feminist movement was the “consciousness-raising group” – an intimate circle who met regularly to provide mutual support. Stories were shared, patterns emerged, and women could see that they were not alone in their struggles. This thread fed into the affinity-group based political organizing of the later 1970s.



*National Mobilization Committee
anti-war protest, Washington DC, 1967,
Photo by Franke Wolfe, courtesy wiki-
media commons.*

Through the social and political activism of the 70s and 80s, “feminist process” became a catch-all term for non-hierarchical, nonviolent, consensus-based organizing. Many anarchist and direct action groups were loosely feminist in this sense.

Reclaiming formed as an explicitly feminist group, but included all genders from the start. In practice, much of the leadership has been women and queer/trans folks, but people of all genders and orientations can be found among teachers and organizers. Within Reclaiming, feminism retains its wide-ranging “activist” meaning.



GAY RIGHTS MOVEMENT 1950S TO 1980S

Gay rights organizing was largely underground and focused on social networks until the 1969 Stonewall riot in New York City sparked public activism. Pride parades sprouted in numerous cities around the globe, with San Francisco's event soon drawing a half-million people.

Over the next generation, particularly in response to the AIDS crisis, gay people were at the forefront of radical organizing in groups such as ACT-UP and Queer Nation.

With its original home base in San Francisco, Reclaiming (both as an activist formation and as a ritual group) has always included strong leadership by LGBTQ folks.

In recent years, young people in Reclaiming have been at the vanguard of shifting gender patterns and expressions – see the *Teen Earth Magic Workbook* in bibliography.

The organizing methods of the gay rights movement – a focus on small, intimate circles that are woven into a broader tapestry by overlapping memberships, coffeehouses, dance and bath clubs, and other social forums – illustrated the strengths of a decentralized network. If one group or tendency was disrupted, people migrated to other groups. There was no central “leadership” that could be repressed or coopted.

This provided a model for a decentralized network of circles and affinity groups that has typified many movements since the late 1970s – see the book *Direct Action* in the bibliography.

THE HIPPIES LATE 1960S

And now a word for our oft-scorned but secretly-loved ancestors, the hippies! You don't have to convert to Fundamentalist Deadheadism to appreciate a movement that prioritized community and creativity over consumption – and taught millions of middle-class people the joys of used clothing.

While not remotely an organized movement, the hippies are associated with the peace and environmental movements of the 1960s, as well as the spiritual awakenings of the era – they were “pagan” in the loose sense of the

word. Probably it is no accident that Reclaiming, uniting spirituality and Earth-activism, first bloomed in the mecca of the hippies, San Francisco.

Woodstock (1969) was the archetypal “back to the land” event that inspired WitchCamps, Burning Man, Rainbow Gatherings, and countless other convergences.

Hippie-jam music helped lay the foundations for acoustic Pagan sounds – Reclaiming's *Campfire Chants* is a back-to-the-land acoustic album.



Millions march for gay rights and justice in São Paulo – a Guinness world record! 2014 photo courtesy Ben Tavener, WikiMedia Commons.

ANTI-NUCLEAR MOVEMENT 1950S TO 1980S

Let's take a quick look at the cauldron in which the earliest Reclaiming affinity groups formed. These ever-shifting activist groups paralleled the magical circles, women's groups, artists' collectives, and social circles that fed into our network.

As the 1960s anti-war movement faded, organizing shifted to environmental issues (the first Earth Day was held in 1970) and anti-

nuclear activism. People had been protesting nukes since the 1950s, with a limited test ban treaty signed in 1963. Vietnam War protests took center stage in the later 1960s, but by the mid-70s anti-nuclear concerns were moving front and center.

Disasters at Three Mile Island (1979) and Chernobyl (1986) drew increased public scrutiny of supposedly beneficent nuclear power, while the election of uber-militarist Ronald Reagan sent a wave of despair and desperation through almost everyone who cared about the future of the planet.

Around the world, people rose up to demand accountability and disarmament, often through nonviolent civil disobedience actions. Inspired by the U.S. Civil Rights Movement, people organized sit-ins, blockades, and occupations to disrupt the war machine and call public attention to the urgent need for change.

Northern California was a hotbed of activism throughout the 70s, 80s, and 90s. During these years, Reclaiming types took part in mass direct actions at Diablo Nuclear Power Plant, Livermore Nuclear Weapons Lab, Vandenberg Air Force Base, Headwaters Forest, and other sites. The actions helped consolidate Reclaiming as a com-





munity. Relations formed in the heat of those years have continued for decades.

See Bibliography for more about this period.

CULTURAL RESISTANCE PLANET EARTH – 1960S TO PRESENT

How do we cover the grassroots culture of the entire planet? We'll have to settle for asking which strands reached the West by the 1980s, influencing our sense of radical popular culture.

Cuba and later Nicaragua modeled alternative economic and social systems where "popular culture" was of necessity homemade. Thanks to progressive community radio stations such as the Pacifica network, Afro-Cuban dance music and Central American Nueva Canción filtered through as less-commercial musical alternatives.

In the mid 1970s reggae began to capture listeners around the world – probably the first musical genre from outside Europe and the U.S. to gain global influence.

By the mid-1980s the movement to end Apartheid in South Africa had gained traction in the West, and led to an infusion of South African music – the vanguard of what would be an underground deluge of African pop by the 1990s. This music introduced a more communal, less star-driven sense of pop music.

Hip-hop culture grew up in New York's Black neighborhoods in the late 1970s, spurred by low-income youth seeking artistic outlets that didn't require corporate sponsorship. This music reached the streets of the Bay Area by the mid-1980s, where it paralleled the vibrant hardcore punk scene – another do-it-yourself subculture.

Throughout the US Southwest, the influence of Mexico's Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) – honored on November 2 each year – has inspired local processions and ceremonies. The annual procession in San Francisco's Mission District, co-sponsored for many years by Reclaiming, is probably the year's largest non-corporate event in the City.

Last but not least, let's mention our self-publishing predecessors – from Digger manifestos to labor pamphlets to anti-war tracts to environmental flyers, to DIY magazines such as Maximum Rock & Roll, GroundWork, and Earth First! Journal – our direct ancestors!

ON BEYOND ZEBRA

And so we reach today – and tomorrow. For Reclaiming, it means recording and releasing our own music (a half-dozen albums of inspiring chants and songs – see page 2 of PDF) and pro-

ducing our own books, such as the one you're reading.

It means organizing new retreats, intensives, and family camps, each with its special focus created by participants.

It means younger generations questioning and challenging their elders (oh, Goddess...) – see our *Teen Earth Magic Workbook* in bibliography.

And it means an open awareness about new cultural trends and influences that will continue our evolution. As we sing on our latest recording:

Ella cambia todo lo que toca, y
Todo lo que toca, cambia!

She changes everything She touches, and
Everything She touches, changes!

THANKS FOR FEEDBACK

The following folks gave key feedback on this activist history essay – thanks!

- Steve Nadel
- M. Macha NightMare
- Laura Perlman
- Irene Vibra Kiebert
- Mary Mimi Gamson
- Dress
- George Franklin
- Mandrake
- Patrick Diehl

Our Magical Ancestors – see earlier sections



The Mahotella Queens – one of the first South African groups to gain a Western following, bringing a new sense of collectivity to global pop music. Photo courtesy Vonvon, WikiMedia Commons



OUR ACTIVIST ANCESTORS

A SHORT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Reclaiming's Activist Origins

Starhawk: Dreaming the Dark

Luke Hauser: Direct Action: An Historical Novel

Activist Fiction

Starhawk: Walking to Mercury

Starhawk: The Fifth Sacred Thing

Starhawk: City of Refuge

Kate Raphael: Murder Under the Fig Tree

Kate Raphael: Murder Under the Bridge

T. Thorn Coyle: The Witches of Portland

Luke Hauser: A Fool Such As I

Activist Nonfiction

Starhawk: Truth or Dare

Starhawk: The Earth Path

Starhawk: The Empowerment Manual

Lisa Fithian: Shut It Down

Luke Hauser: Teen Earth Magic Workbook

Activist Websites

Starhawk.org (all Starhawk, all the time!)

EarthActivistTraining.org (Starhawk & friends' trainings)

DirectAction.org (book, resources, downloads)

ExtinctionRebellion.us (environmental activism)

Wslfweb.org (anti-nuclear and peace activism)

Activist Chants

WeaveAndSpin.org/playlists

CampfireChants.org



Above: Solstice in the Streets, Reclaiming, June 2011

Right: Pagan Cluster musicians join a march through San Francisco – circa 2010. Photos by Luke Hauser.



Mayans Discover Calendar Error

End-of-World Snafu Corrected

The Dzibilchaltun Daily Pyramid, official organ of the Mayan church hierarchy, has revealed that the prediction of the end of civilization, previously scheduled for December 21, 2012, has been moved back 200 years.

"We were sure that the ancient cosmological calendar was ending," confessed an embarrassed Mayan spokesperson. "But it turned out that someone mislabeled the next 200 years, so we thought they had already happened. We have corrected this oversight, and the end of the world is now scheduled for December 21, 2212. We apologize for any inconvenience."

The North American metaphysical industry, which was riding a wave of interest in the 2012 Mayan prophecy, immediately crashed. "For us, this *is* the end of the world," lamented one editor.

WORLD ALREADY OVER?

Meanwhile, the Mystical Blood Rose Fellowship, a Rosicrucian splinter group which had predicted the end of the world for 2010, has also revised its prediction.

"We examined the signs again," said High Prognosticator Lucifer "Larry" Hieronymous. "It seems we were off by 30 years. The world actually ended in 1980. It's over. Done. Kaput. Go Home."

RPWV Archives at RQ.org

In an exclusive scoop, RQ offers a complete reprint of past editions of the Revolutionary Pagan Workers' Vanguard, along with several other satirical features from our pages! Visit www.ReclaimingQuarterly.org

Reclaiming Unveils New Official History

Stung by criticism that its history was "boring" and "mundane," Reclaiming has released a new official account of its founding to coincide with the 30th Anniversary of the Spiral Dance ritual.

Gone are the folksy tales of a small work-group of witches meeting in a San Francisco attic to create the first Spiral Dance.

Reclaiming, it turns out, is a lineal descendant of the original Golden Dawn group, and also of the Rosicrucians, Templars, Freemasons, and the 1920s German Expressionist art movement.

In 1979, Neo-Wiccan prophet Gerald Gardner himself appeared in a vision to Reclaiming's founding coven and called for the organizing of an annual Samhain ritual, to be held in a roller-derby arena (Gardner was a fan of

the San Francisco Bay Bombers). After many years of struggle, Reclaiming fulfilled Gardner's dream when the Spiral Dance relocated to Kezar Pavilion in the early 2000s.

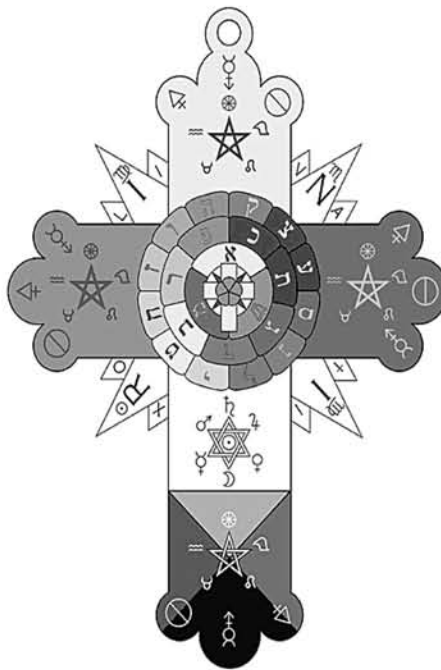
PARACELUS & ZOROASTER

Paracelsus, it has been discovered, wrote Reclaiming's Principles of Unity. Newly-translated documents confirm that the German mage foretold a "groupe of anarchistical witches in Californie whych shall Reclaym the True Faith" and devoted his last years to outlining the founding tenets.

Perhaps more surprising is Persian prophet Zoroaster's assertion that at the "turning of the greate wheele" (i.e., the millennium), secular authorities would launch a wave of persecution against the "deare ones" — a clear allusion to the San Francisco beach police's harassment of Reclaiming's solstice bonfires. (In a troubling footnote, Zoroaster forecast a thousand years of persecution before the "deare ones" triumph. If he was correct, the Solstice fires may be under pressure for another 996 years or so.)

The new official history offers many fascinating revelations, such as the fact that most of Reclaiming's chants were co-authored by the infamous Aleister Crowley, and that archeologist Marija Gimbutas unearthed paleolithic goddess-relics with Reclaiming's PO Box number (14404) carved into them.

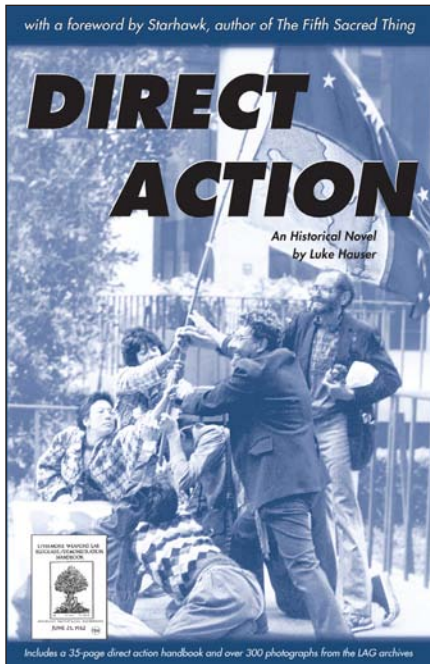
Not all the news was positive. Recent research has debunked claims that thousands of early Reclaiming witches suffered persecution for their faith. After exhaustive archival analysis, the only evidence uncovered was a couple of parking tickets from an Equinox ritual, and an anecdotal account of a really painful paper-cut while collating the newsletter.



The Golden Cross of the Rosy Dawn — just one of many artifacts now known to prophecy the coming of Reclaiming. The "R" in the lower left clearly foretells the group, as do the pentacles.

OTHER BOOKS BY LUKE HAUSER

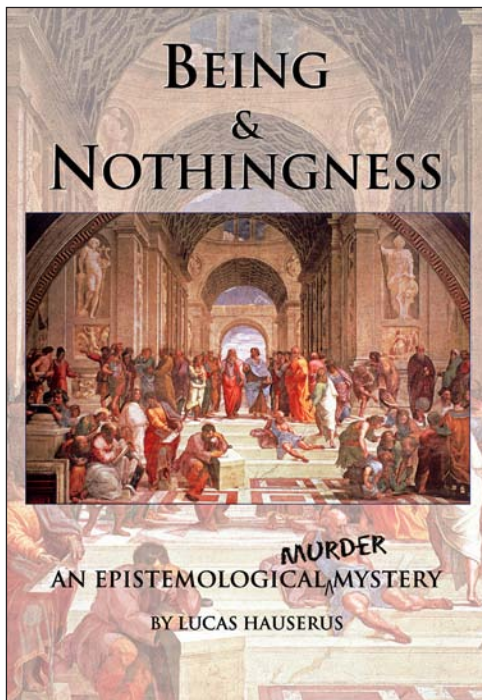
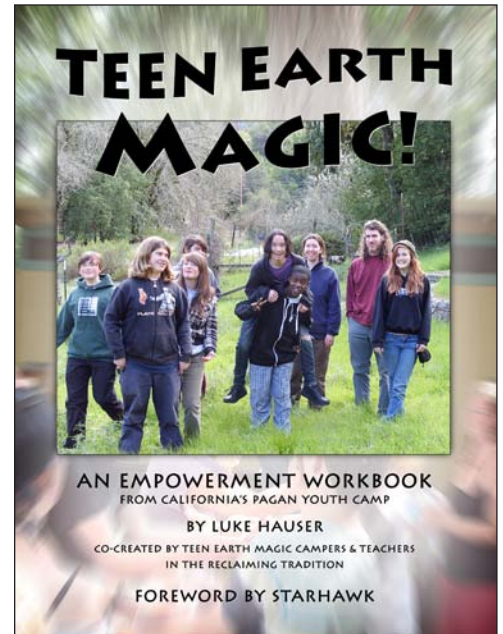
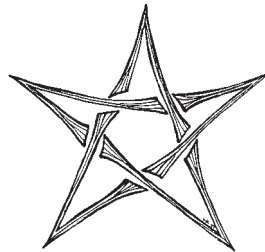
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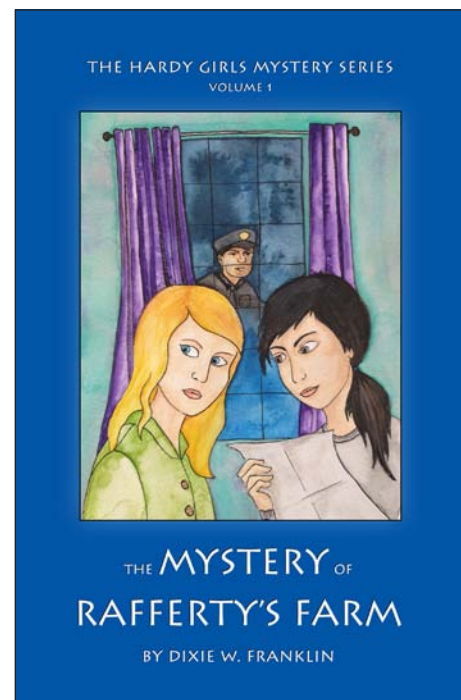
Activist handbook in novel form
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Satires for adults / chapter books for kids. Writing as Dixie W. Franklin, Hauser channels **The Hardy Girls Mystery Series**.